

GANDHIITES AND SOCIALISTS: THE STRUGGLE FOR CONTROL OF
THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS, 1931-1939.

by

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ABSTRACT

James Carroll Wilson, "Gandhiites and Socialists: The Struggle for Control of the Indian National Congress, 1931-1939."

During the 1930s diverse elements within the Indian National Congress, each professing a belief in the tenets of western socialism, combined in a series of attempts to supplant the established leaders of the Congress--the Gandhiites. The Gandhiites responded with an effort to accommodate the socialists within the Congress and, simultaneously, to limit their ability to change Congress policy. By the end of the 1930s, it became obvious that socialism was a factor in Congress politics, not because of the strength of socialist parties in the Congress, but because socialism offered displaced elements in the Congress an opportunity to join anti-Gandhiite coalitions. Such coalitions failed because of the political genius and agility of their Gandhiite opponents and because of the lack of a community of interest (beyond the wish to displace the Gandhiites) among the elements of the coalitions.

Chapter one is an examination of the development of the Congress constitution as an evolving model of the machinery of the Congress as the Gandhiites wished it to be. Chapter two is a discussion of the emergence of socialism in the Congress and of the ways in which socialists wished to change the Congress. Chapters three and four analyze the different ways in which Gandhiites and socialists reacted to British attempts to reform the Government of India. Chapter five is an analysis of points of difference in the Congress which arose over policies instituted by the Gandhiites through provincial governments under their control. Chapter six is an analysis of the Gandhiite policy of non-interference in the political affairs of the princely states and of socialist reaction to that policy. The seventh and final chapter discusses the events which led Subhas Bose to form an anti-Gandhiite coalition in 1939. The failure of Bose's Forward Bloc marked the end of a phase in the socialist challenge to Gandhiite control of the Indian National Congress.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AICC--All-India Congress Committee
AICSP- See CSP
AISA--All-India Spinners Association
AISPC--Papers of the All-India States Peoples Conference
AITUC--All-India Trade Union Congress
AIVIA--All-India Village Industries Association
AP--Associated Press
CAB--Cabinet Office Papers, Public Record Office
CD--Civil Disobedience
CID--Criminal Investigation Division (or Bureau)
CP--Central Provinces
CPB--Congress Parliamentary Board
CPI--Communist Party of India
CSP--Congress Socialist Party
CWMG--Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi
FR--Fortnightly Report
GoI--Government of India
Home--Home Department
Home Pol--Proceedings of the Political Branch of the Home Department
of the Government of India, in the Indian National Archives
IAR--Indian Annual Register (Indian Quarterly Register)
ICG--Indian Conciliation Group
ICS--Indian Civil Service
INA--Indian National Archives
INC--Indian National Congress
IOR--India Office Records
L/P&J--Proceedings of the Secretary of State for India, Public and
Judicial Department Series, India Office Records
L/P&S--Proceedings of the Secretary of State for India, Political
and Secret Department Series, India Office Records
LRC--League of Radical Congressmen ("Royists")
MLA--Member of a Legislative Assembly
MLC--Member of a Legislative Council
MPCC--Madhya Pradesh Congress Committee Papers (contain files of the
Mahakoshal Congress Committee)
NMML--Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
NWFP--North West Frontier Province
PCC--Provincial Congress Committee
PS--Private Secretary

PSC--Parliamentary Sub-Committee of the Working Committee

PSV--Private Secretary of the Viceroy

RTC--Round Table Conference

SoS--Secretary of State for India

TUC--See AITUC

UP--United Provinces

PREFACE

"Gandhiites" in the title is meant to encompass Congress leaders who professed a belief in the tenets of Gandhian philosophy and who wanted (or said they wanted) the Congress to adopt policies which were consistent with that political philosophy. "Socialists" in the title is meant to encompass Congress leaders who professed a belief in the tenets of western socialism and who wanted (or said they wanted) the Congress to adopt policies which were consistent with socialism. I do not intend the terms to be mutually exclusive nor to be inclusive of all Congress leaders. Jawaharlal Nehru, for instance, seemed first to be working in the interest of one group and then in the interest of the other. At times he might have been called a "Gandhiite," at times a "socialist," and at other times neither one at all. C. Rajagopalachari might seem to have been the most faithful of Gandhi's political disciples, but he opposed the policies espoused by the majority of "Gandhiites" when he felt it in the interest of his constituency to do so. Gandhi himself seemed inconsistent in the application of his philosophy.

Nothing herein is meant to suggest that the ideological beliefs of the Congress leaders were lightly held or little valued. But it seems indisputable that certain locally-powerful Congress leaders supported Gandhian philosophy when it suited their political needs, and, when their perception of their political needs changed, they supported socialist doctrines which seemed in direct contradiction of Gandhian philosophy. It is easy and emotionally satisfying to say that all politicians are venal, ideologically promiscuous, and self-seeking. Easy, perhaps, but it is not necessarily helpful to an analysis of the constituent elements of a community of politicians to assume that politicians are ethically apart from the societies they represent. I hope I have not done so.

There have been a number of studies made in the last few years of the politics of the Indian independence movement in the decade preceding the Second World War. My understanding of the way in which the Congress functioned, of the role of socialist parties in the Congress, and of Indian politics in general during the period was much enhanced by a number of these works. I would particularly mention: B.R. Tomlinson's "Nationalism and Indian Politics: the Indian National Congress, 1934-42"

(PhD thesis, Cambridge, 1974); D.D. Taylor's "Indian Politics and the Elections of 1937" (PhD thesis, London, 1972); Thomas A. Rusch's "The Role of the Congress Socialist Party in the Indian National Congress, 1931-42" (PhD thesis, Chicago, 1955); and Zareer Masani's "Radical Nationalism in India, 1931-42: the Role of the All India Congress Socialist Party" (PhD thesis, Oxford, 1976). If I have been able to carry the enquiry any further, it is due to their work and due to the work of others.

I cannot adequately thank nor individually mention the many friends and fellow students of South Asian History who have given freely of their time, expertise, and encouragement and have helped me more than they realize. I am grateful to the librarians, archivists, and staff of the following research institutions: in London: the library and the Centre of South Asian Studies of the School of Oriental and African Studies, the India Office Library and Records, the British Library, the library of the Religious Society of Friends, and the Public Record Office; in Edinburgh: the Scottish Record Office; in Cambridge: the Centre of South Asian Studies; in New Delhi: the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, and the Indian National Archives.

I probably would not have been able to visit New Delhi without the intercession of P.R. Mehendiratta, the Director of the American Institute of Indian Studies in that city. He is a true friend of scholarship. I am grateful to the University of London Central Research Fund for a grant which helped to defray the cost of numerous trips to Cambridge. For many helpful insights gained in discussions with them, my thanks to Kenneth Ballhatchet and David Taylor of the School of Oriental and African Studies, B.R. Tomlinson of Wolfson College, Cambridge, and J.P. Sharma of the University of Hawaii. Of B.N. Pandey, my advisor, mentor and friend, I would only say he made me work harder than I thought I could and do more than I thought was possible. He should receive much of the credit for anything of value herein. Lastly, I want to thank my family Rosetta, Rae, Mary, and Erika, who always acted as if this reclusive student were unfailingly kind, thoughtful, and attentive. I know he was not.

CHAPTER I

The Framework of Gandhian Politics: The Congress Constitution, 1920-39.

Samuel Johnson is supposed to have said, while walking with a friend in the Strand, "I don't like to speak ill of a man behind his back, but I think that fellow up there is a lawyer." With due apologies to Dr. Johnson, Mohandas Gandhi was a lawyer, and what is perhaps worse, he was a politician. Some insight into Gandhi's genius as a lawyer and politician can be gained through an examination of the constitution of the Indian National Congress as it developed under the influence of Gandhi and his political disciples.

The Gandhiite leaders of the Congress--Mohandas Gandhi, Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad, C. Rajagopalachari, et al.--faced continuing challenges from various groups and individuals who wanted, themselves, to control that organization. The Congress was, as a result of its "all-India" aspirations, notable for the diversity of the views of its members. By the summer of 1934, factions within the Congress included a variety of pressure groups ranging from those who more-or-less accepted British policy to those who demanded its rejection, an immediate and open break with the Raj, and a radical reformation of the Indian economy along Marxist-socialist lines.

The Gandhiites had, since their rise to prominence in the early 1920s, attempted to create of the Congress an organization that was both highly disciplined and accommodating of divergent ideologies. Gandhi spoke of a million-member Congress at a time when it was not one-tenth that large, yet he simultaneously advocated drastic cuts in the size of the Congress executive bodies. The salt satyagraha of 1930 and the civil disobedience movement of 1932-33 had demonstrated the organizing capacity of the Congress under Gandhiite leadership. But the waning of enthusiasm in the winter of 1933-34 exacerbated the left-right divisions in the Congress. Gandhi had a plan for the revitalization of Congress discipline, which he announced in what was, for him, a typically dramatic manner.

On 18 September 1934 the Indian newspapers carried a long statement by the Mahatma. It was true he was contemplating "severing all physical connection with the Congress." But some of his friends on the

Working Committee had persuaded him to wait until after the Congress session in October. He would then discover whether he was really wanted by seeing how Congressmen would then vote on a few proposals he intended to place before them. In his statement, Gandhi discussed what he termed his differences with "intellectually-minded Congressmen." He did not fault their personal loyalty, but he didn't want personal loyalty to bind them to a program they did not believe in. Perhaps his support of the charkha (spinning wheel) in the face of their resistance to it was hypocritical, he said:

Nevertheless my conviction is growing that if India is to win complete independence in terms of the toiling millions and through unadulterated non-violence, the spinning wheel and khadi have to be as natural to the educated few as to the partially unemployed and semi-starved millions . . . The removal of the khadi clause in the constitution would mean a removal of the living link between the Congress and the millions whom it has from its inception sought to represent . . .

Gandhi said he welcomed the formation of the "Socialist Group" but he could not support their programs as "published in their authorized pamphlets." He would not use his moral pressure to suppress their ideas, but he did say he couldn't stay in the Congress if those ideas gained ascendancy there. Non-violence might be the policy of the majority of Congressmen, but, said Gandhi, it was a fundamental creed with him: "All I want to say is that ours has not been unadulterated non-violence in thought, word and deed." After implying that his would-be followers did not understand the khaddar program, the needs of the peasant, or the meaning of non-violence, Gandhi said he doubted they understood the Congress creed:

For me poorna swaraj has an infinitely larger meaning than complete independence, but even poorna swaraj is not self-explained. No one meaning or compound expression will give us a meaning which all can understand. Hence on several occasions I have given several definitions of swaraj. I hold that they are all hopelessly incomplete even when put together, but I do not wish to labour this point further.

For himself, Gandhi said he was content to go off into the villages to spread the "message of the spinning wheel" among Hindus and Muslims. "In this and various such other ways I would love to serve the Congress in my own humble manner, whether I am in it or outside." He would let his followers test the validity of his ideas without his presence, but before leaving, Gandhi suggested a few changes in the Congress constitution which, he said, would allow his ideas to be so tested.

Gandhi asked that the words "legitimate and peaceful" in the Congress creed (swaraj by all legitimate and peaceful means) be replaced by "truthful and non-violent." If Congressmen truly believed in non-violence they would not balk at these "unequivocal adjectives." Secondly, Gandhi wanted to replace the four-anna franchise with the requirement that each Congress member provide to the Congress 8000 feet of his or her own hand-spun yarn every month: "Is it too much to expect the intelligentsia and propertied classes to recognize the dignity of labour irrespective of the material benefit it brings?" Thirdly, he asked that only habitual wearers of khaddar who had been on the Congress rolls for six months prior to election day be allowed to vote in Congress elections.

Gandhi also proposed a drastic reduction in the size of the Congress session. He wanted not more than 1000 delegates, or one delegate per 1000 Congress members. To get a full 1000-member delegation would require a million-member Congress. Gandhi said he had no intention of depriving the people of their annual show--there would be ample provision for visitors--but he wanted to make the Congress more effective. "True democracy is not inconsistent with a few persons representing the spirit, the hope and the aspirations of those whom they claim to represent."¹

Gandhi had originally planned to present his constitutional amendments as a resolution which he would treat as a motion of confidence in his leadership. That is, he would resign from the Congress if the amendments were not accepted by the assembled delegates. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji) suggested that Gandhi "resign" before presenting his new constitution and leave it to the members to demonstrate, by their acceptance of the resolution, their desire for his return. Gandhi accepted this advice, privately agreed not to form any new party outside the Congress, and cleared his press statement with his lieutenants. He said that if the Congress rejected the Gandhiite

¹The foregoing quotations were taken from The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, 65 vols. (Ahmedabad, 1958-77) (hereinafter CWMG), vol. 59, pp. 3-12. For a Marxist-socialist critique of the press statement, see E.M.S. Namboodripad, The Mahatma and the Ism (New Delhi, 1959), p.66. Namboodripad, a long-time leftist leader from Kerala, gives his opinion that Gandhi announced his retirement as a ploy to strengthen the right wing of the Congress and to channel the forces of socialism onto a controllable track under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru.

program outlined for it, he expected the other leaders (Rajaji, Patel, Prasad, et al.) to join him in retirement. But the Mahatma made it clear that he didn't think that would be necessary.²

At first, Patel was reluctant to go along with this strategy, but Gandhi managed to bring him around. The Mahatma said he could see no other way to force the rank and file to examine their faith in the Gandhiite program. Gandhi said he would not leave the Congress until Patel and "the others" permitted him to go. Patel, he said, had a responsibility to allow their program to be tested. He also implied that his old friend might think about his own faith in the program: "To cling to the means [~~to~~ power] without faith in it or to fail to act according to one's faith--what a pitiable and frightful condition to be in!" Gandhi said that they had to act, since ordinary Congress members had no feeling for the distinction between "truth and falsehood, violence and non-violence, khadi [~~and~~] calico."³

Gandhi and his lieutenants had, since 1920, built into the Congress constitution a peculiar idiom, a language of Gandhian politics. The concepts of truth, non-violence, khaddar, and swaraj had in Gandhi's writing taken on a series of meanings which, it was implied, were fully understood only by the Mahatma. To make these concepts a part of the constitution was to declare how much Gandhi was a part of the Congress. Gandhi said that if Congressmen wished to have his guidance they had to follow his precepts. But the converse of the proposition is also forcefully implied: If they wanted (or claimed they wanted) to be guided by Gandhi's high moral precepts--truth, non-violence, khaddar, etc.--they had to accept Gandhian discipline. Very few Congressmen were willing to try to do without Gandhi after the successes of the civil disobedience movement. If succeeding meant keeping Gandhi and his precepts, then that was the price the Congress had to pay.

That some Congress leaders felt encumbered by the paraphernalia of Gandhian philosophy is revealed in a remark made by Jawaharlal Nehru: "Often we discussed his fads and peculiarities among ourselves and said, half-humourously, that when Swaraj came these fads must not be encouraged."⁴

²Gandhi to Rajaji, 3 Sept 1934, Prasad Papers, file VII of 1935.

³Gandhi to Patel, 19 Aug 1934, CWMG, vol. 58, pp. 329-30.

⁴Nehru, Autobiography (London, 1936), p. 73.

The constitution that Gandhi wanted to change was largely his own creation. When he first joined the Congress, it was a far different organization than the one he came to lead in the 1920s and 1930s. The annual three or four-day sessions had more in common with the traditional Indian mela than with a serious political meeting. 14,582 delegates attended the Congress session of December 1920⁵--the largest session in pre-independence India. When Congress was not in session, most of its day-to-day business was left to a part-time secretary. Important business was handled by informal groupings of Congress leaders, representatives of a fairly small segment of India's population, English-educated, urban lawyers and middle-class merchants with few political connections in rural India.

The thrust of Gandhian policy from his return to India during World War I was to make the Congress into a dynamic instrument of political change. Gandhi's view of the faults of the Congress as expressed in his press statement of September 1934 shows a number of parallels with his view of the situation in 1920. In both instances Gandhi pressed for changes which he felt would make the Congress more disciplined and efficient and, at the same time, more powerful and more representative of India's peasant masses.

After demonstrating the potential strength of his newly-devised science of non-violent non-cooperation and after rising to a position of some prominence in the Indian National Congress, Gandhi asked for and was given permission to chair a committee which would suggest changes in the Congress constitution. This happened at the December 1919 session of the Congress. Writing about the event some years later, Gandhi said he had tried to get the Congress leaders B.G. Tilak and C.R. Das to help him draft a new constitution but that each had appointed a subordinate to the committee. Tilak and Das deputed N.C. Kelkar and I.B. Sen to look after their respective interests.⁶

By mid-June Gandhi had sent a proposed draft of a new constitution to the two other members of the committee. Gandhi said he had attempted to reduce the unwieldiness of the Congress sessions without ruining their spectacular effect. He wanted to keep the sessions public but to limit the number of delegates to 1000.⁷ Kelkar objected to such

⁵CWMG, vol. 19, p. 198.

⁶Leader, 7 Jan 1929.

⁷Gandhi to Kelkar, [about 15 Jun 1920], CWMG, vol. 17, p. 487.

a drastic reduction and suggested that the deliberative phase of the session be conducted away from the clamor of the public crowds. But Gandhi said that both his proposals were very important. He asked Kelkar to accept the principle of limiting the size of the delegation if not the specific figure 1000, and he also stressed his belief that the public should actually see the Congress debates:⁸

The wh[ole] Con[gress] must be deliberation and demonstration at the same time. If you divide the two, the demonstration will fall flat. The spectators pay to watch our actual debates... When we have limited the number of delegates we carefully rope them in and isolate them from the visitors.

The constitution committee never actually met as a body but carried on its deliberations through the mails. Gandhi, in his report to the A.I.C.C. on 25 September 1920, noted that the members could not agree, even in principle, to limit the size of the Congress session. The idea was Gandhi's alone, and the others felt that even though the Congress was unwieldy, its democratic character would be damaged by limiting the size of the delegation.⁹ But Gandhi persisted and at the Nagpur session (December 1920) the Congress adopted what was largely Gandhi's constitution.

Gandhi implied that it was implemented only because he had enough support from the membership to override the doubts of the Congress leaders: "It was clear to everyone on the platform that the people had taken the reins in their own hands. The platform would gladly have moved at a slower pace."¹⁰ In March 1921, in an article in Young India, the Mahatma told his readers that the new constitution was "in itself calculated to lead to swaraj." It established adult suffrage subject to each member signing the new Congress creed-- "swarajya by all legitimate and peaceful means"--and paying a four-anna membership fee. Gandhi said he hoped the Congress would be able to register 10 million members (it did reach about one-half that size in 1939) and would introduce the spinning wheel into 2 million Indian homes.¹¹

⁸ Gandhi to Kelkar, 2 Jul 1920, CWMG, vol. 18, pp.3-4. The bracketed material is the editor's reconstruction of an insect-damaged part of the manuscript.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 288-90. Gandhi was not the first to want to limit the size of the Congress delegations. As early as 1889, there was an attempt to limit future delegations to 1000. Annie Besant, How India Wrought for Freedom (Faridabad, 1974), p.94.

¹⁰ CWMG, vol. 19, p.198.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 491-2.

The Nagpur constitution, although it was not everything Gandhi wanted it to be, instituted a considerable change in the structure of the Congress. The size of the annual sessions was set at 6000 instead of 1000. The A.I.C.C. was expanded to 350, but a fifteen-man executive, the Working Committee, was formed to carry out the day-to-day work of the Congress. The Congress was divided into twenty-one provincial committees, one for each of a new formulation of linguistic areas, which would, for the purposes of Congress administration, replace the old British administrative divisions of India. This and new machinery to coordinate Congress activities at all levels helped to make the Congress a body which could influence a wide spectrum of Indian opinion. It was no longer confined to discourse with English-speaking Indians.¹²

During the years after the Nagpur Congress Gandhi expressed dissatisfaction with certain aspects of the constitution. In fact, most of the proposals he made in September 1934 had already been put forth by him at some time or other during the previous fourteen years. The spinning franchise, the strengthening of the khaddar clause, and the further reduction in the size of the Congress session and of the A.I.C.C. were not new ideas for his followers. Neither were his ultimata.

Jawaharlal Nehru referred to Gandhi as a leader with dictatorial tendencies and described an address Gandhi gave to a group of Muslim Congressmen in 1920. They could throw him out, said the Mahatma, but so long as they kept him as their leader, they had to accept his conditions, they had to accept "dictatorship" and "martial law."¹³ The inner circle of Gandhi's followers, the "old guard" as they sometimes called themselves,¹⁴ justified these methods by claiming that Gandhi (and thus they themselves) spoke for the inarticulate mass of the Indian people. Gandhi could quite seriously speak of the "silent and unexpressed pressure of mass opinion,"¹⁵ silent, one assumes, to those who did not have Gandhi's gift to hear it. But his statements on the

¹² Gandhi said that the 1920 constitution represented his real entry into the ranks of Congress leaders. Before then, he said, he had, for the most part, functioned as a fund raiser and "draftsman." Leader, 7 Jan 1929.

¹³ Nehru, Autobiography, p. 46.

¹⁴ J.B. Kripalani, The Indian National Congress (Bombay, 1946), p.58.

¹⁵ CWMG, vol. 39, p. 471.

nature of democracy could be contradictory and sometimes seemed to shed doubt on his belief in the wisdom of mass opinion:¹⁶

Those who claim to lead the masses must resolutely refuse to be led by them, if they want to avoid mob law and desire ordered progress for the country. I believe that mere protestation of one's opinion and surrender to the mass opinion is not only not enough, but in matters of vital importance, leaders must act contrary to the mass of opinion if it does not commend itself to their reason.

Gandhi shed further light on his view of the relationship between political leaders and their constituents in his first attempts to establish a spinning franchise in the constitution. Spinning was a key part of Gandhi's entire program. In an article in Young India, 5 June 1924, Gandhi suggested that all members of the A.I.C.C. who did not believe in his program, who did not spin for one-half hour per day, had lost touch with the masses and should resign.¹⁷ On 29 June the A.I.C.C. passed Gandhi's resolution requiring all Congress members to "regularly spin for at least a half hour every day" and to provide to the Congress 2000 yards of yarn per month.¹⁸ When he defended his resolution before the A.I.C.C. meeting, Gandhi said that their adopting the spinning franchise would be an expression of faith in him and in the nation:¹⁹

What will it mean if you merely throw 2000 yards of yarn at me? . . . That way, yarn sent by one person will only serve for a rope to hang me by . . . I wish to see you filled with such faith and only if you have it, should you vote in my favour. Remember that you have to examine your faith, not mine. What is needed is your faith.

In October 1924 Gandhi's friend C.F. Andrews expressed some doubts about the wisdom of making spinning a mandatory part of the Congress program. Wasn't its voluntary nature one of the great strengths of the program? Yes indeed, said Gandhi, his appeal was "addressed only to those who believe in voluntary spinning as an absolute necessity for the country." Such people would, thought Gandhi, have no reason not to make it a condition of joining their own organization. Andrews said that Gandhi was getting his steps out of sequence. He should first convince individual Congress members that spinning was

¹⁶ CWMG, vol. 18, p. 45.

¹⁷ Ibid., vol. 24, p. 191.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 267.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 309.

a good thing and then make it a part of the Congress program. Gandhi did not agree:²⁰

You do not quite realize what the Congress is. Today it happens to be an ill-defined and disorganized institution. There is much more in it than is apparent from its constitution. If the Congress is to be a truly democratic organization, its constitution must be more dynamic, more honest. It must more truly fulfil the requirements of the nation. We don't need members. When I secured the acceptance of the four-anna franchise, I had hoped that the Congress would become a mighty assembly, but workers were lacking. Our country today is a country of idlers and dreamers. I refer, not to the dumb millions who are groaning under poverty and slavery, but to ourselves--the so-called intelligentsia, the talkers. How can I engage all these in some kind of national work except through the spinning wheel? In what other manner could the Congress be made a practical organization? My hope is that this will come about by the 2,000-yards-a-month spinning idea. As matters stand at present, we have nothing like concerted effort at all . . . I aim at concentrating all the energy and effort on one thing and obtaining substantial results.

Gandhi did not rely on the hard sell to achieve all of his ends. A number of Congress leaders who were not particularly fond of the idea of a spinning franchise wanted the Congress to support their efforts to gain seats in the legislature formed under the Government of India Act of 1919. Although Gandhi objected to this idea, he was willing to compromise. In early November 1924, Swarajya Party leaders Motilal Nehru and C.R. Das came to an agreement with the Mahatma on what came to be called the Calcutta pact. He agreed to suspend the non-cooperation movement then in progress and to support Swarajya Party efforts in the next elections. They agreed to the repeal of the four-anna franchise (article 7 of the constitution) and to the substitution of the spinning franchise. They did, however, ask for a qualification: Those who, from "illness, unwillingness or any such cause," were unable to supply their own hand-spun yarn could contribute yarn spun by any other person.²¹

In short order the A.I.C.C. approved of the agreement,²² and the next Congress session (Belgaum, December 1924) made the required change in the constitution.²³ But within a few months Gandhi had to admit that the Congress had not taken to his idea as whole-heartedly as he had hoped it would. In April 1925 he said he realized that it

²⁰ Conversation between Gandhi and Andrews as recorded by Mahadev Desai, 15 Oct 1924, ibid., vol. 25, pp.230-36.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 288-9.

²² Ibid., pp. 351-3.

²³ Ibid., p.492.

had become common practice for Congress organizations to accept money in lieu of yarn for memberships. He seemed resigned to losing on the issue. The spirit of the article, he said, required the Congress to "cater and canvass for only self-spinning members," but he knew that this might not be possible. He had at least wanted Congress members to "take the trouble of knowing good hand-spun yarn from bad and purchasing it."²⁴

The four-anna franchise was reintroduced by the A.I.C.C. on 22 September 1925, and spinning was kept as an alternative. The vote on the resolution was 93 to 7. The same meeting gave Gandhi permission to form a body, under the aegis of the Congress but independent of it, which would promote spinning without taking part in Congress politics.²⁵ Thus, the All-India Spinners Association came into being.

Gandhi's next proposed change in the constitution was to require members to wear khaddar habitually--the 1920 constitution required them to wear khaddar while on Congress business. The Gauhati Congress (December 1926) decided to make the habitual wearing of khaddar a requirement for voting in any Congress election or holding any Congress office,²⁶ but, like the spinning franchise, the mandatory wearing of khaddar proved not to be a complete success. In June 1927, in response to a decline in Congress enthusiasm for the measure, Gandhi wrote that khaddar, if it was the force he believed it to be, would prosper whether or not the Congress accepted it. He asked Congress members to keep it only if they believed in it and if they thought the masses believed in it: ". . . Congress cannot possibly take up things merely because they are good. It can take up things that are good, provided they have popular backing."²⁷

The A.I.C.C. received a number of complaints from Congress members who claimed that local bosses were using the Gauhati resolution on the habitual wearing of khadi as a way of keeping their opponents out of office unfairly. The complainants asked the committee to issue guidelines that would help insure a uniform application of the resolution. As a result, Gandhi drafted a reply for the A.I.C.C. which instructed subordinate committees to accept the word of anyone wearing khadi at Congress functions and claiming to be a habitual wearer of

²⁴Ibid., vol.26, p.445.

²⁶Ibid., vol.32, p.465.

²⁵Ibid., vol.28, p.211

²⁷Ibid., vol.33, pp.458-9.

khadi, unless it could be clearly demonstrated that the person was lying.²⁸ The onus of proof would be on the accuser.

Spinning and khaddar were two of the symbols which Gandhi felt would enable the mass of Indian peasants to identify with his work and with the Congress. Gandhi also hoped that these symbols would give Congressmen, particularly those he termed "intellectuals and talkers," a feeling of affinity with the peasants and with Gandhi himself as the peasants' representative. However, many of the intellectuals and talkers seemed to Gandhi to be more interested in office, in the Congress and outside it, than in what he called his constructive work. Indeed, locally-powerful Congressmen (Swarajya Party members) possessing the pelf and prizes of office, even if only at the lowest levels, were a serious threat to the power of the Gandhiites. The lure of office endangered the Gandhian conception of swaraj.

The response of Congress-Swarajya Party members of the legislative councils and of the Central Legislative Assembly to the Lahore resolution of 1929 must have been a bit of a disappointment to the Congress leaders. On 3 January 1930 Motilal Nehru, in accordance with the Lahore resolution, called on all Swarajya Party members to resign their seats immediately as a first step in the coming civil disobedience campaign.²⁹ At the end of January, twenty-nine percent of the Congress-Swarajya Party M.L.A.s and M.L.C.s were refusing to comply.³⁰ In mid-February with only a few weeks to go before the assembly sessions would have ended anyway, the Working Committee found it necessary to threaten recalcitrant Congress-Swarajya Party M.L.A.s and M.L.C.s with expulsion from the Congress in an effort to get them to resign their seats.³¹

Gandhi did not confine his criticism to those who sought governmental office. In May 1931 Gandhi expressed fears for the future of his movement and said that an office-seeking mentality pervaded the entire Congress. Candidates for Congress committee offices were paying voters' membership fees, providing them transportation to the polling places, and giving feasts to voters in an attempt to gain positions of power in the Congress. But, according to Gandhi, these office seekers were just the men the Congress could do without; if

²⁸ AICC file G43 of 1927. See also file G27 of 1928.

²⁹ Indian Annual Register (hereinafter IAR), 1930, vol. 1, p.17.

³⁰ See Table 3-1 below.

³¹ Home Department Fortnightly Report (hereinafter FR), Bombay, 2nd half of Feb 1930.

their corrupt practices were not stopped, said Gandhi, the independence movement itself would fail.³²

Two years earlier, in 1929, Gandhi had contrasted those in provincial Congress offices who had little time to do "constructive work" with those doing the work who had no desire for office. He expressed his fervent hope that the A.I.C.C. would "tackle that problem to the exclusion of everything else" and come up with a "device . . . whereby the Congress machinery may be worked at full speed and efficiently."³³ The obvious device was to give Congress offices to those who were, as Gandhi said, doing "constructive work"--to force office upon those who were refusing to seek it.

When, in the early weeks of 1929, Gandhiite Jairamdas Doulatram lost a bid to take control of the Sind P.C.C. (provincial Congress committee), Gandhi wrote to the victor, Swami Govindanand, and asked him to become a real sannyasi and resign so that the two Sind leaders could select a third man to be president who would have unanimous support: "Why do you want office when the office does not want you?"³⁴ A few days afterward, in an article in Young India on 21 February 1929, Gandhi publicly chastened Swami Govindanand for attempting to build a political base in order to enter the Legislative Assembly. Jairamdas on the other hand, said Gandhi, had no such selfish intent, had merely been trying to put an impartial man in the presidential chair so he could get on with the real work of the Congress. Gandhi explained that the problems could be seen in the structure of the Sind Congress: with only 400 on the Sind Congress rolls, 45 on the P.C.C., and 15 on the local working committee, there were too many chiefs and too few Indians.³⁵ The "born democrat" could hardly ask the Congress to give up elections, but he did ask it to reduce the number of its elective offices.

In January 1929 at a meeting of the Subjects Committee of the Calcutta Congress, Jawaharlal Nehru revived Gandhi's proposal of 1920 for a 1000-member Congress delegation. There followed considerable discussion: 3000 was put forth as a more realistic figure, but in the end it was decided to keep the number at 6000.³⁶ At the next Congress (Lahore, December 1929), Gandhi asked the Subjects Committee to consider

³² CWMG, vol. 46, pp. 183-84.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 2.

³⁶ Hindu, 2 Jan 1929.

³³ Ibid., vol. 40, p. 416.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 10-12.

reducing the Congress delegation to 1000 and the A.I.C.C. to 100. The present numbers fixed in 1920 (6000 and 350 respectively) were, said Gandhi, conducive only to inefficiency and confusion. He asked if anyone could visualize an effective government with a 6000-member legislature. His proposal lost by ten votes, although it had the support of important leaders of both the left and the right wings of the Congress--notably Jawaharlal Nehru and M.M. Malaviya.³⁷

As Gandhi worked to streamline the Congress, he also worked to keep the Congress machinery firmly in the control of the Working Committee. The committee was established under the 1920 constitution and directed to "perform such functions as may be delegated to it from time to time by the All-India Congress Committee."³⁸ Its duties were not further elaborated by the constitution until March 1931 when the Karachi Congress made it the de jure executive of the Congress, responsible to the A.I.C.C.³⁹

During those years the Working Committee had become the de facto executive of the Congress whose actions were seldom overridden by the A.I.C.C. In January 1928 Gandhi described the Working Committee as the "National Cabinet." He said that since it was required to enforce the resolutions of the A.I.C.C. and of the Congress as a whole and since it best understood the problems of so doing, it should be, for all practical purposes, the sole conduit for resolutions placed before the A.I.C.C. and the Congress: "Any non-official resolution sprung upon the A.I.C.C. must be carefully scrutinized and should have but a remote chance of passing, if opposed by the Working Committee."⁴⁰ Under the 1934 constitution "non-official" resolutions (those not approved by the Working Committee) could not be placed before the Congress except by petition of 25 delegates and with the express support of one third of the Subjects Committee.⁴¹

Members of the recently-formed Congress Socialist Party were among the first to object to some of the proposals Gandhi made in his

³⁷Ibid., 30 Dec 1929.

³⁸Art.24, 1920 constitution, CWMG, vol. 19, p.197.

³⁹IAR, 1931, vol. 1, p.176.

⁴⁰CWMG, vol.35, pp.438-39.

⁴¹AICC, Constitution of the INC as amended at the Bombay Congress (Allahabad, 1934), Art. 9(h,ii).

press statement of September 1934. Commenting on the substitution of the Gandhian code words "truthful and non-violent" for "legitimate and peaceful" in the Congress creed, one of the party founders, Narendra Deva, wondered if it were not just a ploy to make the Congress less comfortable for non-Gandhiites.⁴² Another socialist, Anada Bhaduri, said that Gandhi's efforts to recruit Congress members pure "in word, thought, and deed" was really a way of excluding Congressmen who differed with him.⁴³

The Congress socialists were most exercised about the yarn-spinning franchise which, they said, would make it very difficult for Indian peasants and industrial workers to join the Congress. These, the people the Congress claimed to represent, were, said the socialists, the very people least likely to be able to spare eight hours a month to spin or the money to buy yarn from others. Had not the failure of a yarn franchise in 1924 taught the Gandhiites a lesson?⁴⁴ A meeting of Congress socialists in Benares on 1 October 1934 claimed to have been assured by Gandhi that he would not press the spinning franchise.⁴⁵ They in their turn agreed not to discuss Gandhi's other proposals at that time but formed a committee to consider proposals for a unified socialist resolution to be put before the Bombay Congress.⁴⁶

On 16 October Gandhi released another press statement to elaborate and clarify his proposals. In addition to the amendments he had put forth on 18 September, there were a few items of some interest. Machinery would be set up to insure that provincial committees could be made to account for each and every Congress member by village, taluk, and district. Applicants for membership would be required to sign their name in either the Devanagari or Urdu script, which, said Gandhi, would put some force in the Congress' constant reiteration of its desire to make Hindustani its official language. In order to prevent vote buying, it was proposed that no Congress member would be allowed to vote in a Congress election until he had been on the membership rolls for six months. The city of Calcutta would be made a separate Congress province with the division of the Bengal P.C.C. to be made by the Working Committee. All elections would be by the single transferable vote, and

⁴²Congress Socialist, 29 Sept 1934.

⁴³Ibid., 6 Oct 1934.

⁴⁴Bombay Chronicle, 19 Sept 1934.

⁴⁵Times of India, 2 Oct 1934.

⁴⁶Leader, 4 Oct 1934.

a single election would be held annually in each province to select a P.C.C. The several P.C.C.s when assembled would constitute both the A.I.C.C. and the Congress delegation. An interim A.I.C.C. (also of 1000 members) would be elected by the existing Congress delegates.⁴⁷

In addition to the above, Gandhi proposed amendments which would strengthen the Working Committee, give it the power to examine the records, papers, and account books of "all Congress organizations" and to take over the work of any provincial committee which failed to "function in terms of the constitution." The power of the president to select his own Working Committee, which had been his in practice heretofore, would be formally given him by Gandhi's proposed amendments.⁴⁸

An editorial in the Leader commented that making the Congress delegation and the A.I.C.C. one and the same body would effectively eliminate the A.I.C.C. itself. Gandhi had complained at the size of the body when it had 350 members, said the writer; now he proposed to triple its size. Already, the A.I.C.C. was unable to closely supervise the Working Committee, argued the writer; certainly, a larger body would be even less effective.⁴⁹ Perhaps Gandhi did believe that a larger A.I.C.C. would be less effective than the smaller one had been and that authority lost to it would devolve on the more-disciplined Working Committee.

The proposed separation of Calcutta from the rural areas of Bengal was probably intended to stimulate Congress activity in the latter areas. The Gandhites were convinced that the largely Hindu Bengal Congress was too deeply entangled in the annual struggle to secure offices in the Calcutta corporation to pay any attention to Gandhi's appeals for constructive works in the countryside. A separate Calcutta might leave rural politicians free from the temptations of the patronage of that city's offices and give them time to consider the problems of living in a Muslim-majority province. Although the Gandhites had the support of an active group of "constructive workers" in Bengal, the two major Bengal Congress factions (the supporters of Subhas Bose and those of B.C. Roy) were not enthusiastic at the idea of a separate Congress province of Calcutta. An editorial in the

⁴⁷CWMG, vol. 59, pp.174-84. When it was finally implemented by the Congress in 1936, the single transferable vote applied only to indirect elections to the A.I.C.C.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Leader, 18 Oct 1934.

Amrita Bazar Patrika supported the move as a way to end the constant squabble for the city's offices.⁵⁰ But the more-radical Forward opposed it and expressed great relief when the Gandhiites on the Working Committee finally decided the proposal was unworkable.⁵¹

The Congress Socialist Party countered Gandhi's constitution by proposing a new constitution of their own. The socialists proposed, among other things, abolishing the office of president and replacing the president with a committee to be under the direct control of the A.I.C.C. They wanted the committee to have no power to change or initiate policy. The socialists also repeated their criticism of the spinning franchise and demanded the abolition of the khaddar clause. They proposed that Congress membership be free.⁵²

The C.S.P.'s objection to the office of Congress president and to Gandhi's suggestion to strengthen that office is understandable in the light of their contention that they represented a minority in the Congress which, though powerful, was dispersed widely. Congress socialist Sampurnanand wrote that, although the socialists had often been in some strength in certain areas, they had rarely won elections.⁵³ A president elected by a simple majority of the Congress delegates and who appointed his own Working Committee would be little influenced by minority groups such as the C.S.P. Sampurnanand claimed that Gandhi introduced the single transferable vote as a means of compromising with the socialists on the entire issue of the constitution. That process would assure widely dispersed minority groups (socialists and others) a proportional representation on the A.I.C.C. which they would not have been able to achieve with a distributive vote.⁵⁴ Socialist M.R. Masani also said that Gandhi had supported proportional representation in order to appease the socialists.⁵⁵

⁵⁰A.B. Patrika, 23 Oct 1934.

⁵¹Forward, 24 Oct 1934. For a discussion of the place of Calcutta in Congress politics see John Gallagher "Congress in Decline: Bengal, 1930-39", in Locality Province and Nation, pp.269-325. J. Nehru revived the idea of a separate Calcutta in 1937, but neither he nor the Gandhiites could persuade the controlling Bengal Congress faction that it was a good idea. J. Nehru to Subhas Bose, 16 Apr 1937, and J.B. Kripalani to A.P. Chandra, 10 Apr 1937, AICC file P5 of 1937.

⁵²Leader, 25 Oct 1934.

⁵³Sampurnanand, Memories and Reflections (Bombay, 1962), p.77.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵In a recent interview with Z. Masani, "Radical Nationalism in India, 1930-42: The Role of the All-India Congress Socialist Party", unpublished PhD thesis, Oxford, 1976, p.92.

In fact the single transferable vote was a feature of the 1920 constitution as Gandhi first envisioned it.⁵⁶ Gandhi had declared in November 1920 that if the Congress accepted his advice and limited the size of the delegation, it would have to provide some guarantee of proportional representation--namely, the single transferable vote.⁵⁷ And, in addition, the constitution committee of 1920 had endorsed this suggestion in its report to the A.I.C.C.⁵⁸ The system came into disfavour through the inability or unwillingness of the P.C.C.s to carry out what was a very complicated procedure.

During the 1920s, despite great resistance to the system, the Gandhiites continued to try to find a way to adapt the single transferable vote to difficult conditions in India. During the period, they engaged in an extensive correspondence with the Proportional Representation Society of Great Britain which suggested various methods by which the system might be applied to an unsophisticated electorate.⁵⁹ The single transferable vote was the subject of much debate after 1934 as it had been before. Gandhi's support of the system undoubtedly eased his relations with the C.S.P., but whether that was Gandhi's chief reason for favoring it is debatable.

Gandhi himself explained the details of the new constitution to the assembled Congress delegates; although, there had been some doubt expressed publicly that he would even attend the session. It would seem that the "old guard" had difficulty deciding whether Gandhi's presence at the Bombay Congress would help or hinder his cause. Until a few weeks before the Congress was actually convened, the Bombay Chronicle was reporting rumors to the effect that Gandhi had definitely decided not to attend so as not to stifle free discussion of his proposals.⁶⁰ Late in September Vallabhbhai Patel told reporters that he was trying to persuade Gandhi not to attend the Congress and was quoted as saying of the Mahatma: "He does not believe in springing surprises on the country."⁶¹ Very shortly thereafter, Patel had to admit that he had not

⁵⁶ Art. 8, 1920 Consitution, CWMG, vol. 19, p. 193.

⁵⁷ CWMG, vol. 18, p. 430.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 288-90.

⁵⁹ AICC files G65 of 1928 and G155 of 1930. Some of the prominent British Liberals who were officers of the Proportional Representation Society came into contact with the Indian independence movement in quite different circumstances as members of Parliament and as ministers of state. L.S. Amery, Sir John Simon, and J.C. Wedgewood were vice presidents of the society in the late 1920s.

⁶⁰ Bombay Chronicle, 27 Sep 1934.

⁶¹ Times of India and Hindustan Times, 29 Sep 1934.

been successful, saying that Gandhi would "cheerfully face the agony" of once more explaining his new constitution to the public.⁶²

Gandhi was greeted by wild cheering from the floor as he took the podium on the third day of the Congress session to move the resolution for the adoption of the new constitution.⁶³ The Subjects Committee had appointed Gandhi to head a committee consisting of Bhulabhai Desai, K.M. Munshi, Pattabhi Sitaramayya and Jairamdas Doulatram to prepare a final draft of the constitution for the approval of the Congress.⁶⁴ Before explaining the changes that had been made in his proposals of 15 October, Gandhi apologized for not being able to give the delegates copies of the final draft they were about to vote on. In any case, he said, the constitution was really "a matter for the legal pundits."⁶⁵

Gandhi's proposed change in the Congress creed had been relegated to the limbo of future consideration. An A.I.C.C. poll of the twenty-one Congress provincial committees had drawn responses from seventeen P.C.C.s: twelve disapproved of the new wording.⁶⁶ Despite this, the Gandhites pressed the proposal before the Subjects Committee which decided to refer the matter to the P.C.C.s once again.⁶⁷ The proposals for a reduction in the size of the Congress delegation and of the A.I.C.C. had been modified. The draft constitution proposed a 2000-member delegation (one delegate for each 500 primary Congress members) and a 166-member A.I.C.C. The old constitution had made a district's representation on these bodies proportionate to its population. The new one would do so too but with the proviso that a district had to have a certain number of Congress members for each representative on the higher Congress bodies.⁶⁸

A new provision of the proposed constitution would require that seventy-five percent of the delegates of any Congress province be drawn from rural areas--towns and villages with less than 10,000 population.

⁶²Bombay Chronicle, 30 Sep 1934.

⁶³IAR, 1934, vol. 2, p.257.

⁶⁴N.V. Rajkumar, The Development of the Congress Constitution (New Delhi, 1949), p.69.

⁶⁵CWMG, vol. 59, p.257.

⁶⁶AICC file G68 of 1934.

⁶⁷Times of India, 26 Oct 1934.

⁶⁸CWMG, vol. 59, pp.240-1.

There were adjustments made for the largely-urban provinces of Bombay and Delhi.⁶⁹ For purposes of census enumeration, the Government of India defined towns of less than 5,000 population as rural. By that definition 89 percent of the Indian people lived in rural areas in 1931. Two percent of the Indian people lived in towns of between 5,000 and 10,000, which meant that, by Congress definition, 91 percent of India was rural.⁷⁰ When the division of India into rural and urban constituencies was considered by a Joint Select Committee of Parliament preparing the way for the 1935 Government of India Act, claims were made by representatives of Punjabi and Bengali Hindus that an arbitrary division of villages into rural or urban categories with a 7,500 or 10,000 cut off would unduly favor large agricultural castes (and Muslims) and would sever the long-standing relationships between urban politicians and their rural constituents. It was, they complained, a way of suppressing the previously-dominant Hindu minority in Punjab and Bengal.⁷¹ The 1934 Congress constitution might have had a similar potential effect in the eyes of the minority community in Punjab and Bengal or, for that matter, of any group which felt its greatest strength lay in urban areas.

Representatives of both the right and the left wings of the Congress registered their strong objections to the new constitution. M.M. Malaviya, a champion of conservative Hinduism, was opposed to the ruralization of the Congress and to the wider powers that would be given to the Working Committee. The radical peasant leader Swami Sahajanand said that the centralization of the Congress executive would give the Congress over to the capitalists.⁷² The conservative Tamil Nadu Brahmin S. Satyamurti also objected to the strengthening of the Congress executive: ". . . my fear is that the Working Committee which has already become too powerful a body will practically take the place of the A.I.C.C. and the 1000 delegates will be summoned only once a year."⁷³

The Maharashtrian leader N.C. Kelkar, who had earlier complained of Gandhi's "retirement" tactics,⁷⁴ lent his newspaper's columns to Gandhi's critics including the secretary of the Berar C.S.P., P.Y. Deshpande. Deshpande reiterated C.S.P. proposals for an alternative constitution and concluded: "It would be the height of madness to rush

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Census of India, 1931, vol. 1, part 1.

⁷¹Memoranda presented to the Joint Select Committee on Indian Constitutional Affairs, 1932-33, Lothian Papers, vol. 169.

⁷²Leader, 29 Oct 1934.

⁷³Forward, 22 Oct 1934.

⁷⁴Mahratta, 23 Sep 1934.

in constitutional changes in the heat of emotional excitement generated by the prospect of a sensational retirement of a great leader."⁷⁵ The C.S.P. had placed its proposed resolution on the constitution before the Working Committee, but the Working Committee refused to forward it to the Subjects Committee, claiming that it had arrived too late for full consideration. The C.S.P. tried to gain the twenty-five delegate signatures needed to mount an appeal of the Working Committee decision but could not do so in time to place the matter before the Subjects Committee.⁷⁶

The combined opposition proposed that the draft constitution be given a wider circulation among Congress members and be considered at the next session of the Congress in one year's time.⁷⁷ Gandhi had responded to the same suggestion at the Subjects Committee meeting three days earlier. He asked why the socialists and the others who complained that the present constitution was rotten would want to do nothing about it for another year. Gandhi went on to declare that he and the Working Committee were telling the Congress: "If you want us to carry on then we ask you to arm us with certain powers and if you cannot trust us then you must look for better men to fill our place." Gandhi compared himself to a general who could certainly be replaced but whose orders could not be questioned by the rank and file of the army.⁷⁸

Gandhiite G.B. Pant argued that, with Gandhi leaving, the Congress needed a firm constitution as it had not needed one under the Mahatma. He said that men like Gandhi, Hitler, Mussolini, and Lenin needed no constitution; they could lead without one.⁷⁹ Vallabhbhai Patel said that the draft had been carefully considered by the Congress leaders. Drafting a constitution was difficult, he said, and delegates were not expected to "take a keen interest." This was no rush job, he declared, it had been given the benefit of Gandhi's fifteen years of experience in the Congress. But, he added, delegates were not expected to approve of the resolution merely because it was Gandhi's work. He asked the delegates to consider it on its merits.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Ibid., 21 Oct 1934.

⁷⁷ IAR, 1934, vol. 2, p.258.

⁷⁹ Times of India, 29 Oct 1934

⁷⁶ Searchlight, 25 Oct 1934.

⁷⁸ CWMG, vol.59, pp.233-4.

⁸⁰ IAR, 1934, vol. 2, pp.257-8.

Anti-Gandhiites did win one closely-fought issue at the Lucknow session. After failing to get the Congress to drop all reference to "urban and rural" areas in the constitution and then failing to make "urban" mean cities of 30,000 or greater population⁸⁸--the C.S.P. and its allies managed to keep the "old guard" from eliminating the single transferable vote. The single transferable vote had been difficult to apply in the 1920s when Gandhi first tried to introduce it into the Congress, and it did not go over very well after 1934 either. The Gandhiite Working Committee (now ostensibly no longer under Gandhi's supervision) decided to drop it and introduced a resolution to that effect at the Lucknow Congress.

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya and Sri Prakasa defended the socialist position on the issue, saying that the system was complicated but necessary if minority representation was to be maintained. The Working Committee position was put forth by J.B. Kripalani who said that the system was good in theory but had neither been understood nor properly applied. He said the Congress could not expect success to come from putting a "good thing in the hands of a monkey." He told the socialists to educate the people in its proper use so it could be reintroduced.⁸⁹ Pattabhi Sitaramayya also spoke for the Working Committee; he claimed that there was certainly no animosity in the committee towards the socialists, that they were all socialists in spirit.⁹⁰ Jawaharlal Nehru, then Congress president, supported the C.S.P. position on the issue,⁹¹ and, after considerable debate, the resolution went to a vote in the open session. A show of hands was favorable to the opposition; the Gandhiites demanded a division and lost that too, 207 to 227.⁹²

While on a visit to London in September 1935, M.R. Masani approached officers of the Proportional Representation Society for further advice as to how the single transferable vote could be used in India. The difficulties as seen by the Society's secretary, J.H. Humphreys, were twofold: first, the Congress lacked the necessary trained

⁸⁸ Leader, 12 Apr 1936.

⁸⁹ IAR, 1936, vol. 1, pp.288-9.

⁹⁰ AICC, Report of the 49th Session of the Indian National Congress (Lucknow, 1936), p.113.

⁹¹ Leader, 12 Apr 1936.

⁹² IAR, 1936, vol. 1, pp.288-9.

returning officers and staff to count the votes and, second, the Congress electorate (even in the indirect elections to the A.I.C.C.) was not sophisticated enough to fully understand the balloting system. Humphreys suggested that, instead of the single transferable vote, a device called the scheduled vote be used, since it would be easier for the voters to understand and for the returning officers to tabulate.⁹³

As it is usually applied, the single transferable vote allows voters in a particular district to fill a fixed number of elective offices (usually five per voting district) by ranking competing candidates in order of preference. Any candidate receiving a pre-determined quota of first preference votes gains a seat. The quota for a five-seat district is one vote more than one-sixth of the total ballots cast; thus, it is possible to fill all five seats on first-preference votes alone. If, however, seats remain vacant after first-preference votes are counted, second-preference votes are counted. The process is repeated until all vacant seats are filled. In practice, the Congress found it impossible to apply the system in the above manner and usually held separate consecutive ballots, having voters express their first preference on the first ballot, second preference on the second ballot, etc., until all seats were filled. By Mr. Humphreys' proposed scheduled vote system, each candidate would, prior to the election, post a public notice showing how he would distribute second, third, fourth (etc.) preference votes. And voters would then cast one ballot, indicating the candidate and the list they approved of.⁹⁴ The Congress did not take up the suggestion.

Election reform was an issue at the Faizpur Congress (December 1936), but little concrete action was taken. Rajendra Prasad, noting that seven of Bihar's sixteen districts were unrepresented on the A.I.C.C., proposed that the Congress give the A.I.C.C. the power to change the election procedures from time to time as it saw fit. His proposal was not accepted.⁹⁵ Two months later Jawaharlal Nehru told members of the Bengal P.C.C. that the way in which they applied the single

⁹³Humphreys to J.B. Kripalani, 26 Sep 1935, AICC file FD1 of 1935.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Searchlight, 30 Dec 1936.

transferable vote was so incorrect as to nullify the system's theoretical advantages while maintaining its drawbacks. They had merely been holding a single ballot and filling all seats according to a count of first-preference votes.⁹⁶

In an undated note, probably written just prior to the Haripura Congress (April 1938), the executive committee of the C.S.P. admitted that the single transferable vote was not working out well but also acknowledged that it was the only factor allowing them to retain a few seats in the A.I.C.C. "except perhaps in the U.P. and Bengal (owing to the protecting presence of certain personalities)." The committee argued that the system worked in small districts, such as Bombay city where four A.I.C.C. members were elected, but not in large districts. The C.S.P. wanted the large provinces broken down into five-seat districts (which was supposed to have been done by the 1934 constitution) with all delegates in the province voting in each district.⁹⁷

In practice, Congress districts sometimes included entire provinces and held as many as 40 A.I.C.C. seats. The Gandhiites wanted to divide these districts but, unlike the socialists, intended that delegates would only vote in their home districts. This, according to the C.S.P. executive, would be a disaster for the party since it would divide their strength. In the U.P., for instance, where they estimated they controlled twenty percent of the delegates (largely from urban-industrial areas), the C.S.P. could expect to gain one seat in each five-seat district but only if all delegates voted in each district.⁹⁸ The socialists' hopes were not to be fulfilled, however.

In May 1938 a meeting of a constitutional committee created by the Haripura Congress recommended that the single transferable vote be dropped.⁹⁹ Meeting again in September, the committee supported efforts to fix A.I.C.C. delegates to specific territories and maintained its stand against the single transferable vote.¹⁰⁰ Gandhi had, since the summer of 1938, complained of corruption in the Congress and had spoken of the need for a thorough revision of the constitution. He did not want to fight a new constitution through the Tripuri Congress (March 1939),

⁹⁶J. Nehru to the president of the Bengal P.C.C., 24 Feb 1937, AICC file P5 of 1937.

⁹⁷One of a collection of C.S.P. resolutions and newsletters, AICC file G40 of 1938.

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹AICC file G42 of 1938.

¹⁰⁰IAR, 1938, vol. 2, pp.286-88.

where the Gandhiites would be busy with other matters, but he did support the formation of another constitutional committee which would report to the A.I.C.C. On the eve of the Tripuri Congress, the Mahatma urged his supporters to push through a resolution which would give the A.I.C.C. the power to enact a new constitution without having to submit it to the Congress at large.¹⁰¹ The Congress passed such a resolution.¹⁰²

The constitutional reform committee (J. Nehru, P. Sitaramayya, J.B. Kripalani, and Narendra Deva) met from 3 to 7 June 1939 and submitted its report to the A.I.C.C. The committee recommended (among other things) that two-thirds of the seats on the A.I.C.C. be filled by a single distributive vote of delegates from closely-defined, small voting districts. The remaining third would be elected by a single transferable vote of the assembled delegates in a province. Narendra Deva did not concur with this suggestion but wanted all A.I.C.C. members elected by a single transferable vote. The committee also recommended that the Working Committee be given the power to declare the members of any communal or other anti-national organization ineligible for membership in Congress elective bodies. Neither Nehru nor Narendra Deva concurred with this recommendation. They felt the power was inherent in the constitution and was better left unwritten.¹⁰³ Quite obviously, it was a short step from banning the Muslim League or Hindu Mahasabha to ousting the C.S.P. or any other minority Congress party. Both of these recommendations were considerably altered by the Working Committee after they were strongly protested by the Congress socialists.¹⁰⁴

Most of the committee's other recommendations for tightening Congress discipline were, however, incorporated into the 1939 Congress constitution. Under its rules, no member could **vote** in a Congress election unless he had been on the membership rolls for the full year preceding the election. No one could be elected a Congress delegate or a member of a Congress committee unless he had been on the membership rolls for the three consecutive years preceding the election. Congress delegates would be drawn from and elected by members in fixed electoral districts.

¹⁰¹Gandhi to J. Nehru, 9 Mar 1939, J. Nehru Papers, part I, vol. 25.

¹⁰²Harijan, 19 Mar 1939.

¹⁰³Report of the constitution committee, AICC file G31 of 1939.

¹⁰⁴IAR, 1939, vol. 2, p.260.

And A.I.C.C. members would be drawn from and elected by delegates in those districts.¹⁰⁵ Although the single transferable vote was retained for A.I.C.C. elections, its advantages for the C.S.P. were partially nullified by this last provision. C. Rajagopalachari said that the 1939 constitution was not everything the "old guard" wanted it to be. It would not purge the Congress of anti-Gandhiites, but it might restrain their activities: "It merely serves as a friction apparatus. But under present conditions we cannot make the fundamental changes that we really require."¹⁰⁶

The Gandhiites never did manage to write everything they wanted into the constitution, but they had a remarkable ability at interpreting ambiguous phrases to their advantage. Their enemies liked to depict them as deft conjurors who could by sleight of hand keep themselves at the top of an organization restive under their control. A socialist from Poona, picking on one aspect of the 1939 constitution, the clause requiring Congress members to be on the rolls for one year before they could vote, noted that it would not go into effect for six months. This would, claimed the critic, get the "old guard" through the next two elections without having to face a group of new, radical members he was expecting to join the Congress. He concluded sourly: "At the end of this period they will get up some stunt . . . and again keep the left wing at bay."¹⁰⁷

The Gandhian constitution was designed to weld what it was hoped would be an ever-expanding Congress membership into a controlled and powerful political force. But as the Congress grew larger and larger in the last half of the 1930s, it grew more and more difficult to control. From an unrecorded low during the civil disobedience movement of 1932-33 the Congress grew to 4.5 million members in 1939. That total was 1.3 million larger than that of the year before, seven times larger than the membership figure of the year before that, and nine times larger than the membership figure of the year before that (see Tables 1-1 to 1-5). With this growth came a proliferation of demands for representation on committees the size of which the Gandhiites wished to control.

¹⁰⁵ AICC circular letter, 5 Jul 1939, Prasad Papers, file 2A of 1939. See also, AICC, Constitution of the Indian National Congress ... 1939, Allahabad, 1939.

¹⁰⁶ Rajaji to S. Satyamurti, 18 Jun 1939, Satyamurti Papers.

¹⁰⁷ Mahratta, 30 Jun 1939.

In October 1936 the Congress president, Jawaharlal Nehru, told Rajendra Prasad that he felt "rather at sea with the constitution" and asked for an interpretation of a provision which he and J.B. Kripalani could not agree on. They were having difficulty deciding how to distribute Congress delegates to the various provinces. He gave an example: By applying three separate clauses of the constitution to the population and membership figures for Mahakoshal (C.P. Hindi), they could come up with three different sets of figures for the size of the Mahakoshal delegation and for the rural-urban division of the delegation. Kripalani and Nehru agreed that there should be 23 urban delegates; it was the number of rural delegates that they did not agree on. If they divided the rural population of the province by 250 (as required by one rule), they came up with 123 as the number of rural delegates. Another rule seemed to limit the number of rural delegates to 99. And yet a third rule seemed to demand that there be no more (nor less) than three times as many rural delegates as urban, which would give a figure of 69 rural delegates. Nehru wanted the middle figure and Kripalani the lowest; they agreed to defer to Prasad's judgement.¹⁰⁸ Prasad admitted that there were some ambiguities in the rules and suggested that 99 was the correct figure.¹⁰⁹

As the Congress grew larger in 1938 and 1939, the Working Committee began to favor a more-restrictive interpretation of the rules governing the size of Congress delegations and of the A.I.C.C. Yet each province could find itself the subject of a special rule or of a slightly different interpretation of the rules, depending on the vigor with which it pursued its demands and on the way in which those demands meshed with the priorities of the Working Committee. An examination of the figures for Congress membership in the various provinces from 1936 to 1939 and the consequent distribution of delegates and A.I.C.C. membership (see Tables 1-1 to 1-5) will convince one that the distribution of delegates and of A.I.C.C. membership was not a simple procedure. It was, rather, a juggling of priorities and demands. Rules were changed or bent as the situation required.

An examination of Tables 1-1 to 1-5 below will show that during the two Congresses of 1936 Ajmer had more delegates than were justified by its membership. In 1938 and 1939 it had more delegates than its

¹⁰⁸ Nehru to Prasad, 31 Oct 1936, Prasad Papers, file III of 1936. See Table 1-3 below.

¹⁰⁹ Prasad to Kripalani, 2 Nov 1936, ibid.

population justified. The North West Frontier Province never returned reliable figures for Congress membership (Congress activity was banned there until 1937), so its representation at each of the four Congresses was the subject of arbitration. The membership figures for the United Provinces in 1938 and 1939 so far exceeded one-one hundred thousandth of the population that in 1938 it had 1925 members per delegate and in 1939 it had 2963 members per delegate. The Gandhiites had reason to keep the rather radical U.P. Congress under-represented on the Congress executive.

The Indian Marxist M.N. Roy claimed that these figures were merely a small manifestation of an extensive conspiracy by the Gandhiites to keep themselves on top of the Congress. Besides mentioning some of the above juxtapositions of numbers (and distorting a few others), Roy noted that Congress delegates were elected before nominations for the presidency were accepted and before the Working Committee made public the resolutions it intended to present to the upcoming Congress. Thus, said Roy, primary members had no prior knowledge of the issues their representatives were going to vote on and were rather severely hampered when it came to influencing Congress decisions. This was not democracy, said Roy: "Everything is done, or undone, from the top."¹¹⁰

In early 1939 Gandhi warned that a foreign ideology (socialism) might be used by the unscrupulous to divide the Congress and weaken its discipline. The organization had weathered such ideological storms in earlier years when it was smaller, but now its great size increased the danger:¹¹¹

Recently mainly due to influences from abroad there have grown up ideological differences. Not unoften these genuine ideological differences are exploited by the selfish and the self-seeking, and those who are restive of Congress discipline. Our organization however has not grown with our numbers. Nor has the Congress constitution been framed in the light of ideological differences among the ranks of Congressmen. Therefore it is no wonder that the organization is unable to cope with the new difficulties created. Nevertheless some way to solve the problem has got to be found if we are to avoid shipwreck.

The possibility of a "shipwreck," a chaos of disunity, had been seen by Gandhi some years earlier. His repeated attempts to limit the size

¹¹⁰ A.B. Patrika, 16 Jan 1939. See also M.N. Roy, On the Congress Constitution (Calcutta, 1939).

¹¹¹ Quoted in the introduction to AICC, The Report of the General Secretary, March 1938 to February 1939 (Allahabad, 1939).

of Congress committees, to make them accountable to the Congress executive and subject to its discipline are ample evidence of his concern.

The Mahatma believed that the ramarajya (rule of God) of his dreams would come when the peasants accepted a life of truth and non-violence and exercised the power such a life would bring. But in the imperfect India of the 1930s uneducated peasants rarely made speeches or stood for election. Gandhi expressed a profound distrust of the glib and the educated who did. He did not believe that they--intellectuals and talkers--represented India's peasant masses and, until the peasants could speak for themselves, Gandhi felt it his duty to direct the freedom movement in their behalf.

In 1934 Gandhi said of Jayaprakash Narayan:¹¹²

He has read much but does not seem to have digested all that he has read. And he certainly has no experience. But he can pour out in speeches what he has read. That impresses educated people, which fact increases his enthusiasm and he leaves home and family, neglects his health, and goes about rousing people.

There was room in Gandhi's tightly-controlled political organization for those who believed in his program and were willing to follow his road to swaraj. The Gandhian constitution was designed to help save the Congress from those who did not, from intellectuals and talkers, office seekers and socialists.

¹¹²Gandhi to Vallabhbhai Patel, 19 Aug 1934, CWMG, vol. 58, p.328.

TABLE 1-1: Population of Congress Provinces (1931 Census*).

| Province | Population* | Maximum Number of Delegates** | | | AICC*** |
|-----------------|-------------|----------------------------------|-------|-------|---------|
| | | Rural | Urban | Total | |
| 1. Ajmer | 1,757,688 | 13 | 4 | 17 | 2 |
| 2. Andhra | 25,039,906 | 188 | 63 | 251 | 31 |
| 3. Assam | 5,985,828 | 45 | 15 | 60 | 8 |
| 4. Bengal | 54,382,211 | 408 | 136 | 544 | 68 |
| 5. Bihar | 32,282,034 | 242 | 81 | 323 | 40 |
| 6. Bombay | 1,133,796 | -- | 11 | 11 | 1 |
| 7. Burma | 14,667,146 | 110 | 37 | 147 | 18 |
| 8. Delhi | 1,387,543 | 11 | 4 | 15 | 2 |
| 9. Gujerat | 11,449,477 | 86 | 29 | 115 | 14 |
| 10. Karnatak | 16,274,303 | 122 | 41 | 163 | 20 |
| 11. Kerala | 10,136,976 | 77 | 25 | 102 | 13 |
| 12. Mahakoshal | 14,625,768 | 110 | 37 | 147 | 18 |
| 13. Maharashtra | 17,352,725 | 131 | 43 | 174 | 22 |
| 14. Nagpur | 3,040,496 | 23 | 8 | 31 | 4 |
| 15. N.W.F.P. | 5,300,000 | 40 | 13 | 53 | 7 |
| 16. Punjab | 28,490,957 | 214 | 71 | 285 | 36 |
| 17. Sind | 3,887,070 | 29 | 10 | 39 | 5 |
| 18. Tamil Nadu | 23,036,973 | 173 | 58 | 231 | 29 |
| 19. U.P. | 49,614,833 | 373 | 124 | 497 | 62 |
| 20. Utkal | 16,692,651 | 125 | 42 | 167 | 21 |
| 21. Vidarbha | 3,441,838 | 27 | 8 | 35 | 4 |
| Totals | 338,980,219 | | | 3,354 | 425 |

TABLE 1-2: Congress Membership (Lucknow, April 1936).

| Province | Congress Members Enrolled | | | Delegates Awarded | | | AICC | Members per Delegate |
|-----------------|---------------------------|-------|---------|-------------------|-------|-------|------|----------------------|
| | Rural | Urban | Total | Rural | Urban | Total | | |
| 1. Ajmer | -- | -- | 282 | -- | -- | 10 | 1 | 28 |
| 2. Andhra | -- | -- | 45,103 | -- | -- | 81 | 7 | 557 |
| 3. Assam | -- | -- | 2,620 | -- | -- | 10 | 1 | 262 |
| 4. Bengal | -- | -- | 32,186* | -- | -- | 60 | 5 | 536 |
| 5. Bihar | -- | -- | 78,805 | -- | -- | 158 | 13 | 499 |
| 6. Bombay | -- | -- | 17,262 | -- | -- | 21 | 3 | 822 |
| 7. Burma | -- | -- | 669 | -- | -- | 10 | 1 | 67 |
| 8. Delhi | -- | -- | 8,637 | -- | -- | 13 | 1 | 664 |
| 9. Gujarat | -- | -- | 24,065 | -- | -- | 47 | 4 | 512 |
| 10. Karnatak | -- | -- | 21,049 | -- | -- | 37 | 3 | 569 |
| 11. Kerala | -- | -- | 4,062 | -- | -- | 10 | 1 | 406 |
| 12. Mahakoshal | -- | -- | 26,044 | -- | -- | 45 | 4 | 579 |
| 13. Maharashtra | -- | -- | 28,258 | -- | -- | 44 | 4 | 642 |
| 14. Nagpur | -- | -- | 8,138 | -- | -- | 12 | 1 | 678 |
| 15. N.W.F.P. | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 21 | 2 | -- |
| 16. Punjab | -- | -- | 12,618 | -- | -- | 16 | 1 | 789 |
| 17. Sind | -- | -- | 4,024 | -- | -- | 10 | 1 | 402 |
| 18. Tamil Nadu | -- | -- | 55,004 | -- | -- | 93 | 8 | 591 |
| 19. U.P. | -- | -- | 62,703 | -- | -- | 104 | 9 | 603 |
| 20. Utkal | -- | -- | 6,829 | -- | -- | 14 | 1 | 488 |
| 21. Vidarbha | -- | -- | 7,058 | -- | -- | 13 | 1 | 542 |
| Totals | | | 445,416 | | | 829 | 72 | |

TABLE 1-3: Congress Membership (Faizpur, December 1936).

| Province | Congress Members Enrolled | | | Delegates Awarded | | | AICC | Members per Delegate |
|-----------------|---------------------------|--------|---------|-------------------|-------|-------|------|----------------------|
| | Rural | Urban | Total | Rural | Urban | Total | | |
| 1. Ajmer | -- | -- | 1,769 | -- | -- | 20 | 4 | 88 |
| 2. Andhra | 39,425 | 13,112 | 52,537 | 158 | 52 | 210 | 26 | 250 |
| 3. Assam | 8,325 | -- | 8,325 | 30 | -- | 30 | 4 | 278 |
| 4. Bengal | 60,342 | 24,786 | 85,128 | 241 | 99 | 359* | 45 | 237 |
| 5. Bihar | 90,665 | 14,078 | 104,743 | 219 | 56 | 275 | 34 | 381 |
| 6. Bombay | -- | 29,015 | 29,015 | -- | 25 | 25 | 4 | 1161 |
| 7. Burma | -- | -- | 627 | -- | -- | 20 | 4 | 31 |
| 8. Delhi | 7,232 | 4,611 | 11,843 | 27 | 9 | 36 | 5 | 329 |
| 9. Gujarat | 23,344 | 13,315 | 36,659 | 73 | 24 | 97 | 12 | 378 |
| 10. Karnatak | 20,690 | 10,358 | 31,048 | 83 | 41 | 124 | 16 | 250 |
| 11. Kerala | 4,740 | 2,250 | 6,990 | 19 | 9 | 28 | 4 | 250 |
| 12. Mahakoshal | 30,755 | 5,672 | 36,427 | 99 | 23 | 122 | 15 | 299 |
| 13. Maharashtra | 29,370 | 16,376 | 45,746 | 116 | 39 | 155 | 19 | 295 |
| 14. Nagpur | 3,473 | 3,488 | 6,961 | 14 | 7 | 21 | 4 | 331 |
| 15. N.W.F.P. | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 34 | 4 | -- |
| 16. Punjab | 13,713 | 12,798 | 26,511 | 55 | 51 | 106 | 13 | 250 |
| 17. Sind | 288 | 3,224 | 3,512 | -- | -- | 20 | 4 | 176 |
| 18. Tamil Nadu | 42,329 | 22,776 | 65,105 | 167 | 56 | 223 | 28 | 292 |
| 19. U.P. | 46,284 | 19,449 | 65,733 | 185 | 78 | 263 | 33 | 250 |
| 20. Utkal | 4,719 | 1,041 | 5,760 | 19 | 4 | 23 | 4 | 250 |
| 21. Vidarbha | 7,482 | 4,210 | 11,692 | 23 | 8 | 31 | 4 | 377 |
| Totals | | | 637,131 | | | 2,222 | 249 | |

TABLE 1-4: Congress Membership (Haripura, March 1938).

| Province | Congress Members Enrolled | | | Delegates Awarded | | | AICC | Members per Delegate |
|-----------------|---------------------------|--------|-----------|-------------------|-------|-------|------|----------------------|
| | Rural | Urban | Total | Rural | Urban | Total | | |
| 1. Ajmer | 1,460 | 5,147 | 6,607 | 6 | 19 | 25 | 4 | 264 |
| 2. Andhra | 285,149 | 48,881 | 334,030 | 175 | 58 | 233 | 29 | 1434 |
| 3. Assam | 12,558 | 3,088 | 15,648 | 30 | 10 | 40 | 5 | 391 |
| 4. Bengal | 126,573 | 88,399 | 214,972 | 354 | 144 | 525* | 59 | 409 |
| 5. Bihar | 419,419 | 42,589 | 462,008 | 219 | 73 | 292 | 37 | 1582 |
| 6. Bombay | -- | 48,525 | 48,525 | -- | 25 | 25 | 4 | 1941 |
| 7. Burma | -- | -- | 5,097 | -- | -- | 20 | 4 | 255 |
| 8. Delhi | 5,439 | 10,488 | 15,927 | 15 | 5 | 20 | 4 | 796 |
| 9. Gujerat | 65,415 | 30,643 | 96,058 | 73 | 24 | 97 | 12 | 990 |
| 10. Karnatak | 95,017 | 24,241 | 119,258 | 122 | 41 | 163 | 20 | 732 |
| 11. Kerala | 29,458 | 5,159 | 34,617 | 62 | 21 | 83 | 10 | 417 |
| 12. Mahakoshal | 73,291 | 12,316 | 85,607 | 99 | 33 | 132 | 17 | 649 |
| 13. Maharashtra | 126,798 | 37,182 | 163,980 | 109 | 36 | 145 | 18 | 1131 |
| 14. Nagpur | 15,103 | 11,809 | 26,912 | 19 | 7 | 26 | 4 | 1035 |
| 15. N.W.F.P. | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 34 | 4 | -- |
| 16. Punjab | 95,494 | 34,083 | 129,577 | 155 | 52 | 207 | 26 | 626 |
| 17. Sind | 2,580 | 6,420 | 9,000 | 10 | 10 | 20 | 4 | 450 |
| 18. Tamil Nadu | 193,013 | 67,354 | 260,367 | 167 | 56 | 223 | 28 | 1168 |
| 19. U.P. | 842,583 | 96,757 | 939,340 | 366 | 122 | 488 | 61 | 1925 |
| 20. Utikal | 84,504 | 3,353 | 87,857 | 112 | 13 | 125 | 16 | 703 |
| 21. Vidarbha | 36,465 | 10,263 | 46,728 | 23 | 8 | 31 | 4 | 1507 |
| Totals | | | 3,102,113 | | | 2,954 | 370 | |

TABLE 1-5: Congress Membership (Tripuri, March 1939).

| Province | Congress Members Enrolled | | | Delegates Awarded | | | AICC | Members per Delegate |
|-----------------|---------------------------|---------|-----------|-------------------|-------|-------|------|----------------------|
| | Rural | Urban | Total | Rural | Urban | Total | | |
| 1. Ajmer | 3,188 | 9,963 | 13,151 | 13 | 39 | 52 | 6 | 253 |
| 2. Andhra | 284,749 | 50,456 | 335,205 | 188 | 63 | 251 | 31 | 1335 |
| 3. Assam | 33,565 | 3,756 | 37,321 | 45 | 15 | 60 | 8 | 622 |
| 4. Bengal | 363,110 | 120,048 | 483,158 | 408 | 136 | 544 | 68 | 888 |
| 5. Bihar | 508,373 | 54,896 | 563,269 | 242 | 81 | 323 | 40 | 1744 |
| 6. Bombay | -- | -- | 61,936 | -- | -- | 25 | 4 | 2477 |
| 7. Burma | -- | -- | 2,223 | -- | -- | 10 | 2 | 222 |
| 8. Delhi | 6,608 | 12,815 | 19,423 | 11 | 4 | 15 | 4 | 1295 |
| 9. Gujerat | 63,394 | 29,024 | 92,418 | 86 | 29 | 115 | 14 | 804 |
| 10. Karnatak | 146,846 | 25,257 | 172,103 | 122 | 41 | 163 | 20 | 1056 |
| 11. Kerala | 46,562 | 8,469 | 55,031 | 77 | 25 | 102 | 13 | 540 |
| 12. Mahakoshal | 113,633 | 12,921 | 126,554 | 110 | 37 | 147 | 18 | 861 |
| 13. Maharashtra | 109,277 | 39,267 | 148,544 | 131 | 43 | 174 | 22 | 854 |
| 14. Nagpur | 26,641 | 18,213 | 44,854 | 23 | 8 | 31 | 5 | 1447 |
| 15. N.W.F.P. | -- | -- | -- | 40 | 13 | 53 | 7 | -- |
| 16. Punjab | 143,343 | 45,448 | 188,791 | 214 | 71 | 285 | 36 | 662 |
| 17. Sind | 8,345 | 13,948 | 22,293 | 29 | 10 | 39 | 5 | 572 |
| 18. Tamil Nadu | 278,706 | 85,687 | 364,393 | 173 | 58 | 231 | 29 | 1577 |
| 19. U.P. | 1,345,781 | 126,675 | 1,472,456 | 373 | 124 | 497 | 62 | 2963 |
| 20. Utikal | 192,245 | 6,080 | 198,325 | 125 | 24 | 149 | 19 | 1331 |
| 21. Vidarbha | 60,812 | 17,574 | 78,396 | 27 | 8 | 35 | 5 | 2240 |
| Totals | 4,479,844 | | | 3,301 | | | 418 | |

Notes to Tables 1-1 to 1-5:

Table 1-1:

*The Congress estimates of population of the provinces are based on the 1931 census (except for that of Kerala which is based on the 1921 census). Figures arrived at are the result of the addition of the figures for the British districts in a province and for the province's associated states. States with borders contiguous to more than one Congress province had their populations assigned to those provinces according to the language of their inhabitants. There was considerable controversy as to which Congress province controlled what state and as to how states would be divided between neighboring provinces. Territory (and the associated population) of one British province might be awarded to a different Congress province. For example, the Congress province of Bengal included parts of British Assam.

**The theoretical maximum number of delegates to be assigned to a province was arrived at by dividing the population of a province by 100,000. Seventy-five percent of the delegates were to be drawn from rural areas, twenty-five percent from urban areas. A province was further required to enroll at least 250 members for each delegate awarded. This last figure was altered from 500 which had been the required figure before the Faizpur Congress.

***A province could elect one A.I.C.C. member for each eight delegates it was awarded.

Table 1-1 is compiled from information in AICC, Report of the General Secretary, March 1938-February 1939 and from AICC file G54 of 1934-36.

Table 1-2:

*An additional 10,199 members for Bengal were being disputed.

Table 1-2 is compiled from information in AICC file 76 of 1936.

Table 1-3:

*The total of Bengal delegates included 19 who were appointed to represent Midnapore district where Congress activity was banned.

Table 1-3 is compiled from information in AICC, Report of the Secretary General, April to December 1936 (Allahabad, 1936). See also Prasad Papers file IX/36, collection 4.

Table 1-4:

*The total of Bengal delegates included 27 who were appointed to represent Midnapore district.

Table 1-4 is compiled from information in AICC file 3 of 1938.

Table 1-5:

Table 1-5 is compiled from information in AICC, Report of the Secretary General, March 1938 - February 1939.

CHAPTER II

The Emergence of Congress Socialism and the Gandhiite Reaction to it, 1926-36.

In the 1920s there grew up in the Congress, particularly among its younger members, a view of India's economic future that did not square with Gandhi's plans for village-centered industries. More and more Indians, the sons of middle-class lawyers and merchants, went to western Europe or to North America to complete their education. They returned from Berkeley, Cambridge, or the London School of Economics convinced of the need for a rapid industrialization, westernization, and socialization of the Indian economy. They had attended the lectures of economists such as Harold J. Laski, had listened to Labour Party candidates standing for election, and had read socialist and Communist newspapers banned from the sub-continent. Recalling those days many years later, the editor of the newspaper India said that the returned students considered their fellows who were not socialists to be fairly unintelligent.¹

This is not to imply that all or even most of these young, western-returned socialists became political activists when they got back to India. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote that the Indian students he knew at Cambridge had indeed seemed radical. Many emulated the fiery B.G. Tilak, but many (even some of the most radical) took the I.C.S. examinations and later became civil servants, lawyers, or judges. Nehru wrote that the reason he himself didn't take the I.C.S. examination was that his family didn't want him to have to stay in England for two or three years after graduation (he was below the minimum age for the examination) and didn't want him to take a job that would require him to do a great deal of traveling.²

Until the death of Lenin, the Soviet Union attempted to support and to influence a wide spectrum of political elements within the

¹The editor of India, Dr. Kumria, in an interview given in April 1953 to Thomas A. Rusch, "The Role of the Congress Socialist Party in the Indian National Congress, 1931-42," unpublished PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 1955, p.60.

²Nehru, Autobiography, pp.22-24.

Congress. A few Indian Marxists such as M.N. Roy, S.A. Dange, and Shaukat Usmani, were directly in touch with Soviet officials and took part in the formation of Comintern policy towards the Indian independence movement.³ But these men were not directly connected with the policy-forming bodies of the Congress. However, many leading Congressmen who were not themselves dedicated Communists or socialists found much to admire in the Soviet Union and were influenced by Soviet propaganda.

The appearance on the Indian political scene of young, western-educated Indians and the influence of Soviet and British Communists were leavening factors in the growing radicalization of the Indian National Congress. Indications of a swing to the left in the general ideological tone of the Congress are scattered and diverse. For the decade preceding the mid-1930s, it is difficult to precisely delimit a leftist faction (or factions) in the Congress, to label this man a budding Marxist, that man a moderate socialist. In this period very few leftist Congressmen articulated a consistent or specific ideological program that they wanted the Congress to follow. Congress leftists were, for the most part, men that Jawaharlal Nehru termed "vaguely socialistic."⁴

At the annual Congress session at Gauhati (December 1926) the Gandhiites introduced a resolution for the education of the people in Gandhi's program for self-improvement. And, as they were to do again and again in the following years, the old guard were careful to include another resolution favored by leftist and internationally-minded Congressmen. It was decided to encourage the dissemination of information to foreign countries in order to interest their peoples in the Indian freedom movement. And Jawaharlal, who was then in Europe, was appointed to represent the Congress at the Congress of Oppressed Nationalities to take place in Brussels in February 1927.⁵

The Brussels meeting was attended by radical leftists from India, China, Arabia, Korea, Indonesia, Indochina, Annam, Japan, northern and southern Africa, North and South America, and from almost all of the European nations.⁶ Nehru told the Indian National Congress that the meeting in Brussels impressed him with the need to establish links with

³J.P. Haithcox, Communism and Nationalism in India . . . (Princeton, 1971), pp. 1-50.

⁴Nehru, Autobiography, p. 555.

⁵IAR, 1926, vol. 2, p. 322.

⁶Hindu (weekly), 9 Jun 1927.

the various national movements throughout the world; he said that Indians had much in common with these other peoples and would benefit from an exchange of views with them.⁷ When he returned from Europe, Nehru persuaded the Congress (Madras, December 1927) to declare a policy of non-cooperation in any Anglo-Russian war. He and other Congress leftists feared that British military activities on the North West Frontier foreshadowed an invasion of the Soviet Union.⁸ The Congress refusal to join a British attack on Russian Communists was coupled with a similar refusal to participate in British persecution of Communists in India.

Even conservative Congress leaders such as Motilal Nehru and M.M. Malaviya opposed the Government of India Public Safety Bill of 1928 which was intended to control foreign and domestic Communist agents. Nehru and Malaviya did so even though a great many Indian Communists were rabidly anti-Congress.⁹ In the Central Legislative Assembly, the Public Safety Bill did not have smooth sailing. The Home member of the Viceroy's Council, James Crerar, assured the members that it was aimed solely at foreign Communist agents, and yet it was strenuously opposed, passing by the narrow margin of 58 to 54.¹⁰ In the most famous of the resulting court cases, the Meerut Conspiracy Case of 1929, eight of the thirty-two defendants were members of the A.I.C.C. and were given legal assistance by prominent, conservative Congressmen.¹¹

In the mid- and late 1920s, the Indian National Congress began to make some gestures of support for the nascent Indian trade union movement. In May 1927 the A.I.C.C. decided to appoint provincial co-ordinators to organize rural and urban labor groups. A Bombay member asked that such coordinators be required to consult with the All-India Trade Union Congress, but the A.I.C.C. would not be so bound. It was agreed to accept the help of the A.I.T.U.C., however.¹² Gandhi was accused of being against the trade union movement. But in March 1927,

⁷IAR, 1927, vol. 2, pp.152-59.

⁸Nirmala Joshi, Foundations of Indo-Soviet Relations (New Delhi, 1975), p.99.

⁹Gene D. Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller, Communism in India, (Berkeley, 1959), p.124.

¹⁰Leader, 7 Feb 1929.

¹¹Overstreet and Windmiller, p.135.

¹²IAR, 1927, vol.2, pp.12 & 27.

he said his support of village industries did not mean that he opposed the organization of urban workers. He insisted, however, that they be organized along non-violent lines. He said that he was actually involved in such a work of organization but that it had to proceed slowly because of the danger of creating needless antagonism between so-called capital and labor:¹³

My ideal is equal distribution but so far as I can see it is not to be realized. I work for equitable distribution. This I seek to attain through Khaddar--and since its attainment must sterilize the British exploitation at the centre--it is calculated to purify the British connection. Hence in that sense Khaddar leads to Swaraj.

But many of the younger Congressmen were dissatisfied with what seemed to them to be the slow and plodding nature of Gandhi's program. They wanted the "British connection" to be "purified" quickly. The Congress was united in its decision to boycott the Simon Commission sent in 1928 by a dying Tory government to report on the political situation in India. Even the moribund National Liberal Federation supported the boycott.¹⁴ The commission had no Indian members and, according to a wide segment of Indian opinion, had no effective means of assessing the true situation in India. Although Congress politicians agreed that reform could not be forced on India from London, they did not agree as to what constituted an acceptable reform package.

The point of divergence between leftist and rightist members of the Congress was whether or not "swaraj" in the Congress creed admitted some connection with Britain in the future or whether it meant the Congress could accept nothing less than complete and total independence for India. The issue was not an absolutely reliable dividing line between radicals and conservatives, socialists and non-socialists, in the Congress, but most of those who called themselves socialists were firmly on the side of complete independence. At the Calcutta Congress (December 1928), Gandhi proposed a resolution designed to provide a

¹³M.K. Gandhi, "Labour in the Cities", in IAR, 1927, vol.1, p.71. For many years Congressmen dreamed of a coalition between the Congress and the trade union movement. The Gandhites attempted to form their own labor organizations. Jawaharlal took a great interest in the A.I.T.U.C.; he presided at its annual conference in December 1929 (Hindu, 2 Dec 1929). And in May 1936 he helped cement an agreement between the Congress and the A.I.T.U.C. whereby they would cooperate in forming a joint policy towards the 1937 elections. AITUC, Report of the 15th Annual Session (Bombay, 1936).

¹⁴Hindu, 1 Jan 1929.

compromise solution of the dispute.

An all-parties conference, chaired by Motilal Nehru, had produced a report which recommended a future policy for the Indian independence movement. The report (commonly called the Nehru report) suggested certain conditions under which India should accept dominion status. Gandhi's resolution proposed that the Congress approve the Nehru report and give the British government until 31 December 1929 to accept it as the basis of a settlement. After that date "swaraj" would mean "complete independence". Gandhi proposed that the Congress begin a campaign of non-violent non-cooperation if the British did not meet the deadline.¹⁵

Subhas Bose moved an amendment to reject dominion status. He said that Gandhi's resolution amounted to a lowering of the independence flag for twelve months. Speaking in support of Bose's amendment, Jawaharlal Nehru asked his listeners if they really intended to ask their sons, the nation's youth, to sacrifice their lives for mere dominion status.¹⁶ After extensive debate and a division of the delegates, Bose's amendment was lost by a vote of 973 to 1350.¹⁷ Jamnadas Mehta told a reporter from the Madras Hindu that, at an earlier meeting of the Subjects Committee, Gandhi and Motilal Nehru had threatened to resign from the Congress if Gandhi's resolution were not accepted. Even then, said Mehta, the committee had only reluctantly passed the resolution.¹⁸

As it happened the British did not accept the Nehru report by 31 December 1929, and Gandhi, by his shrewd compromise, managed to bring a united Congress into the civil disobedience movement. The Mahatma's suggestion that Jawaharlal be elected president of the Lahore Congress (December 1929) was certainly a factor in the compromise. In August Gandhi had himself refused the nomination, saying that he (Gandhi) was not keeping pace with the younger generation in the Congress and that he wanted the dissidents to have a president who would properly represent them. Gandhi thereupon recommended Jawaharlal.¹⁹

In his presidential address to the Congress, Jawaharlal expressed his opinion that even if the Congress could not follow a socialist line at the time, it must not forget its duty to the people. He criticised Gandhi's theory of the trusteeship of the wealthy, adding that industry

¹⁵ AICC, Report of the 43rd I.N.C., Calcutta, 1928 (n.p., 1928), p.107.

¹⁶ Hindu, 1 Jan 1929.

¹⁷ Report of the 43rd I.N.C., p.142.

¹⁸ Hindu, 15 Jan 1929.

¹⁹ IAR, 1929, vol.2, p.14.

should be run for the people, not for its wealthy owners. He went on to suggest that the Congress try to work with labor unions and other interested organizations and adopt some general principles for economic and social reforms for a free India.²⁰ Earlier in the year the Congress had adopted a few such principles but not precisely in the form that the socialists wanted.

At an A.I.C.C. meeting in May 1929, Sri Prakasa moved a resolution for the U.P. Provincial Congress Committee which was designed, he said, to add a socialist dimension to the Congress program:²¹

This Conference recommends to the All-India Congress Committee that, in the opinion of this Conference, the great poverty of the Indian people is due not only to the foreign exploitation of India, but also to the economic structure of Society which the alien rulers support so that their exploitation may continue. In order therefore to remove this poverty and misery, and to ameliorate the condition of the Indian masses, it is essential to make revolutionary changes in the present economic and social structure of Society. And to remove the gross inequalities, provision should be made for providing a living wage for every worker, to tax heavily all unearned income, to supply adequate land to the peasants, and to protect them from interference of all middlemen.

The more-conservative members of the A.I.C.C. were not pleased with the part of the resolution beginning: "And to remove the gross inequalities . . ." It was decided that, although the committee might endorse the principles of the resolution, they did not, at that early date, feel it necessary or wise to commit the Congress to specific details of some future program. After being so amended, the resolution was put to a vote. It was necessary to poll the committee three times in order to get a decision. The first two votes were tied (16:16 and 23:23), but on the final vote the amended resolution was passed.²²

On January 26, 1930, a crowd of 25 to 30 thousand people attended an "independence day" celebration in Bombay.²³ There and in other places a sense of impending action pervaded the atmosphere. British observers noted that even conservative Indian politicians would not openly defy the growing enthusiasm of the electorate for the Congress call

²⁰ Ibid., pp.293-4.

²¹ Hindu, 27 May 1929.

²² Ibid.

²³ FR, Bombay, 2nd half of Jan. 1930. The meeting broke up when about 1000 members of the Communist Girni Kamgar Union took over the platform and raised a red flag.

for complete independence. On 5 February 1930 a special meeting of the Ahmedabad municipality invited Jawaharlal Nehru to address the city; the resolution passed by an almost-unanimous vote.²⁴ This should not be taken as an indication of the municipal council's political views. The city officers might well have disagreed with Jawaharlal's politics, but they were unwilling to openly snub Nehru or the Indian National Congress.

Gandhi decided to inaugurate civil disobedience with another of his dramatic gestures. The Dandhi salt march and a massive British repression followed. By the summer, practically all of the Congress leaders were in jail and no longer publicly occupied in a discussion of the social and economic future of a free India. Further public debate between socialists and moderates, radicals and conservatives, would await the end of the active phase of the civil disobedience movement. By the end of the year there was considerable interest in negotiations then under way between the Viceroy and Gandhi. Congress conservatives hoped the negotiations would lead to the end of civil disobedience and to the resumption of constitutional activity on the part of the Congress. Congress leftists opposed such an eventuality.

In December 1930 the U.P. conservative Congress leader Purshottamdas Tandon threatened to pull his followers out of the Congress if the foreshadowed agreement fell through.²⁵ He and other Congressmen felt that the Congress had made great gains during the movement but that more could be achieved in future by a legal organization than by a continually-persecuted one. The Governor of Madras, Sir George Stanley, wrote to the Viceroy in mid-January 1931, telling him that a number of Congressmen who were, evidently, thinking of future elections wanted the political advantage of a jail record and were clamoring to get arrested, on the assumption that they would soon be released in a general amnesty.²⁶ When on 25 January the Viceroy ordered the release of the Working Committee so that it might meet and consider the agreement he and Gandhi had arrived at, Congress leftists attacked Gandhi and the pact.²⁷

²⁴Ibid., 1st half of Feb 1930.

²⁵Sir Fredric Sykes to Lord Irwin, 2 Jan 1931, Halifax Papers, vol.26.

²⁶Stanley to Irwin, 16 Jan 1931, ibid.

²⁷IAR, 1931, vol.1, p.23.

One way in which the Gandhiites attempted to accommodate pressure from radicals can be seen in their handling of the Baghat Singh case. Baghat Singh, a Punjabi Sikh, was sentenced to transportation for life for his part in a bomb-throwing incident and was in jail awaiting execution of his sentence when evidence implicating him in the murder of an assistant superintendent of police was discovered. Singh was tried for this second crime and was subsequently sentenced to death by a judicial tribunal.²⁸ He was young, handsome, and eloquent and made a great impression on the public at his two trials. Motilal Nehru, the then Congress president, visited Singh in his jail cell in January 1930 and expressed the concern of all Congress members for Singh's predicament.²⁹ A year later, just before the Karachi Congress (March 1931) was convened, reports coming to the Viceroy indicated that Congress leftists might try to build the agitation for a stay of Singh's execution into an all-out attack on the Gandhiite leaders of the Congress.³⁰ A few weeks earlier Gandhi had pleaded with the Viceroy to delay Singh's hanging if he could not call it off altogether. Gandhi told Lord Irwin that political tension would be much reduced if, in the circumstances, Singh's execution were postponed (*i.e.*, until after the Congress session).³¹

The Mahatma was unsuccessful in this attempt to mollify radical sentiment, but the Gandhiites continued to prepare for leftist and rightist opposition at Karachi. On the eve of the session, Vallabhbhai Patel told a large crowd in Bombay that the Congress was working to gain the trust of the labor movement, assuring union members present that Gandhi had tried to have the Meerut conspiracy prisoners included in the amnesty of C.D. prisoners but had failed because they were arrested before the outbreak of civil disobedience.³² At about the same time, Gandhi promised that the younger generation would have its day at Karachi.³³ But he also said that if his peace agreement with the Viceroy were not approved by the Congress they would have to find a new Mahatma and a new Working Committee.³⁴

²⁸ Notes on the Lahore Conspiracy Case, L/P&J/6 file 5164 of 1928.

²⁹ Home Secretary to SoS, 9 Jan 1930, L/P&J/6/1983.

³⁰ Home Secretary to SoS, 23 Mar 1931, L/P&J/6 file 5164 of 1928.

³¹ Notes on the Viceroy's interview with Gandhi, 17 Feb 1931, Sykes Papers, vol. 3.

³² Bombay Chronicle, 9-Mar 1931.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Leader, 11 Mar 1931.

At about this time Subhas Bose came to Bombay to discuss with Gandhi the implementation of the truce. He (Bose) told reporters that he had had many discussions with youth league leaders, trade unionists, and socialists and was exploring the possibility of forming a left-wing movement such as the one he had helped organize at Lahore--the Congress Democratic Party. He added that he was fully in favor of socialism and socialist doctrines: "Indians need not regard socialism as an extraneous plant of which they need beware."³⁵

In addition to the radical groups Bose named, there were others who might have joined an anti-Gandhiite coalition. A great pool of unemployed laborers had been drawn upon to fill the ranks of demonstrators during the civil disobedience marches and had been given stipends for so doing. Now that the demonstrations were called off these paid volunteers were out of a job and represented a considerable faction that was dissatisfied with the Gandhi-Irwin pact and with Gandhi's leadership.³⁶

On March 27th Bose addressed members of the Navajavan Bharat Sabha (a militant youth organization) and outlined his proposals for a new Congress program. He visualized a socialist economic policy to attract peasants and workers, a disciplined army of young Congress volunteers, a similar organization of Indian women, and the creation of a "new literature for propagating the new cult and programme."³⁷ Gandhi was aware of the potential strength of the, as yet, disunited dissident groups on the left.

Two days before Bose addressed the Navajavan Sabhaites, Gandhi told them that capital and monied men could not be made extinct, but he hoped that monied men could be persuaded to become the trustees of their employees, to use their wealth for the benefit of all. He went on to say that peasants and workers should be assured of enough to feed, house,

³⁵Bombay Chronicle, 21 Mar 1931.

³⁶Sykes to Irwin, 24 Mar 1931, Halifax Papers, vol.26. The Gandhiites were sensitive to criticism about the payment of volunteers. When the C.D. movement resumed a year later, the Working Committee passed a resolution forbidding such payments but allowing a "bare maintenance" wage for poor men and women and for dependents of jailed volunteers. Willingdon to Hoare, 1 Jan 1932, Templewood Papers, vol.11.

³⁷Quoted in S.K. Bose, Beacon Across Asia (New Delhi, 1973), p.256. The speech was reported in Searchlight, 29 Mar 1931.

and clothe themselves and to "live in ordinary comfort as self-respecting human beings." But he thought they should not be led to expect more. Given this minimum, said Gandhi, some would surely rise in wealth, but it was also human for the wealthy to want to help others. He had, after all, given away his wealth, everything he owned, to help the poor.³⁸

The Gandhiites told the leftists at Karachi that if they would agree to the Gandhi-Irwin pact, the old guard would present them with a kind of bill of rights, the Karachi declaration of fundamental rights. The concept had been suggested by Jawaharlal Nehru, and the final draft of the resolution was prepared by Nehru, C. Rajagopalachari, Pattabhi Sitaramayya, and S. Satyamurti.³⁹ It committed the Congress to a detailed list of rights that would be guaranteed in a future free Indian nation. These rights included: freedom of the press, of speech, religion, association, language and script. There would be no discrimination on the grounds of sex, religion, caste, or creed in regard to public employment or office, or to the exercise of any trade or calling. All would have equal rights of access to public roads, wells, schools, etc. The right to bear arms in accordance with regulations was guaranteed as was security of property from unwarranted search and seizure.

The resolution included a list of measures that would be a part of any future Indian constitution. Most of the proposed reforms were in keeping with the most modest of liberal programs. But there were a few exceptions. One measure committed the Congress to support state control of key industries and state ownership of mineral resources. Another advocated a progressive tax on agricultural incomes. In addition there were measures which appealed to the Gandhiites--prohibition, a Rs. 500 per-month limit on civil service salaries, and the removal of taxes on salt.⁴⁰ The resolution was far less than the socialists would have wanted but it was a beginning.

On 30 March, just before the resolution on fundamental rights was to be placed before the open session of the Congress, Jawaharlal moved a resolution approving the Gandhi-Irwin pact and appointing Gandhi to represent the Congress at the Round Table Conference in London.⁴¹

³⁸Quoted in Tendulkar, Mahatma, 8 vols. (Bombay, 1951-54), vol.3, pp.95-96.

³⁹Leader, 2 Apr 1931.

⁴⁰IAR, 1931, vol.1, pp.277-79.

⁴¹Leader, 1 Apr 1931.

Nehru had spoken against the pact at a meeting of the All-India Students Convention only a few days earlier,⁴² but he had been persuaded to sponsor it at the Congress. Yusuf Meherally, a student leader from Bombay and a future leader of the Congress Socialist Party, said that on behalf of the youth of the country he opposed the Gandhi-Irwin pact and the Congress presence at the R.T.C. as an unthinkable compromise with the British.⁴³ Other leftists complained that the resolution was an abrogation of the Lahore resolution on the goal of complete independence.⁴⁴

Vallabhbhai Patel, the Congress president, answered the leftists' objections to the pact and denied that the Congress was backing down from the Lahore resolution. He said that independence did not mean the refusal to associate with Britain on terms of equality dissolvable by either party.⁴⁵

If India is to reach her independence through consultation and agreement, it is reasonable to suppose that there will be British association. I am aware that there is a strong body of opinion in the country to the effect that before a partnership could possibly be conceived, there must be complete dissociation. I do not belong to that school. It is, as I think, a sign of weakness and of disbelief in human nature.

Gandhi said that he himself had no faith in the Round Table Conference but that he felt it his duty to try every path to bring his opponents to see the truth. After this last plea, the resolution passed uneventfully.⁴⁶ Even Subhas Bose gave it his endorsement.⁴⁷

Gandhi himself introduced the resolution on fundamental rights. He was aware of critics on the right who felt that such a detailed outline of specific policies would improperly restrict a future constituent assembly and of critics on the left who felt the resolution did not go far enough. He assured them that it was open to future meetings of the A.I.C.C. or of the Congress to revise, add to, or amend the resolution. So, said Gandhi, no one should oppose the resolution on mere matters of detail. He warned the conservatives that if they rejected the basic principles of the resolution, they would live to regret it: "Those . . . who are opposed to the policy and principle must reject it, but they must bear in mind that the poor man's swaraj is soon coming and let them not be found unprepared when it actually comes."⁴⁸

⁴²IAR, 1931, vol.1, pp.352-53.

⁴⁴IAR, 1931, vol.1, p.269.

⁴⁶Leader, 2 Apr 1931.

⁴⁸CWMG, vol.55, pp.373-74.

⁴³Leader, 2 Apr 1931.

⁴⁵Ibid., p.262.

⁴⁷Ibid., 30 Mar 1931.

Some months after the Karachi Congress, after the resolution was passed, Gandhi again assured his followers that there was nothing final about the resolution and that it did not commit the future government of free India to any specific laws or policies: "Let it also be remembered that the Congress resolution is not yet a part of the constitution. When it is, its interpretation will not rest with me or any single individual. It will rest with the courts duly established by law."⁴⁹ At the A.I.C.C. meeting in Bombay in August 1931, attempts to include a rider to the resolution insuring equal inheritance and marital rights for women and men under the law were rejected, as were attempts by more-conservative members to raise the minimum wage for civil servants from Rs. 500 to Rs. 2000 per month on the grounds that the former figure was not large enough to attract the best men and to discourage bribery and corruption.⁵⁰

Not everyone was satisfied with the results of the Karachi Congress, but it was a success for the Gandhites. They had managed to manipulate a potentially hostile Congress into approving a Gandhian program. The old guard gave the leftists some measure of the reform policy they wanted--the resolution on fundamental rights--and exacted from the leftists support for their own favored resolution approving the Gandhi-Irwin pact. Gandhi himself introduced the former and talked Jawaharlal, the darling of the leftists, into introducing the latter. In addition, Gandhi was given a free hand (within broad guidelines) to negotiate for the Congress at the Round Table Conference in London. Vallabhbhai Patel was Congress president and the old guard was firmly in control of the Working Committee. When civil disobedience was resumed in 1932, there was little question as to who was in charge of the Congress. Socialist opposition to the Gandhites did not become very noticeable again until the C.D. movement began to die out in the autumn of 1933.

During both phases of the C.D. movement (in 1930 and 1932-33), particularly when demonstrations against the Government of India were at their height, the differences between individual (or groups of) Congressmen were swamped in a flood of nationalist feeling. Activists wore the scars and bandages from lathi blows as badges of patriotism. When the Madras police took to the use of canes in place of lathis, representatives of the demonstrators asked the police to go back to the lathis. Blows from the canes were much more painful than lathi blows and left less-demonstrable injuries.⁵¹ The protestors wanted something

⁴⁹ Ibid., vol. 56, p. 362.

⁵⁰ Leader, 10 Aug 1931.

⁵¹ FR, Madras, 1st half of Feb 1931.

to show for having participated in a demonstration.

One manifestation of the political unity produced by British repression can be seen in the unwillingness of even the most-conservative Indian politician to openly oppose the Congress activists for fear of ending on the wrong side of a future political fence. One British observer commented:⁵²

. . . we may well ask ourselves why an anti-Congress movement is so slow in organising itself? Why is it that even those leaders who have openly dissociated themselves from the Congress programme give so little active assistance to Government against the Congress and always, when possible, urge the withdrawal of the Ordinances? Why, again, are so many of the smaller people still ready to court jail rather than disobey the Congress injunctions? What is it, in short, that keeps the Congress power alive at a moment when its defeat by Government has never been more obvious?

The answer to all these questions surely lies in the future: in the widespread belief that when the present power of Government is removed, when autonomy comes, the Congress will be left without any real rival in the political field.

What was true of Gandhi's critics outside the Congress was true of those inside the Congress as well. But as the shadow of British repression began to lift from the Congress, as the civil disobedience movement wore to an end, the political differences between Congressmen became more and more apparent.

In July 1933 Congress leaders meeting in Poona very nearly brought the civil disobedience movement to a close. They were only prevented from so doing by some very adroit maneuvering by Gandhi.⁵³ There was now coming into the open a considerable section of the Congress which wanted the movement to end so that the Congress could participate in the local autonomy promised by the 1932 White Paper. In July conservative Congressmen were said to be preparing a campaign to drop direct action and to revive "constitutional activity."⁵⁴ While Rajagopalachari attempted to revive C.D. in Trichinopoly, his fellow Madras Congress leader S. Satyamurti was trying to form a "new association" to carry out legal, constitutional activities.⁵⁵

According to British observers there were, at the end of October 1933, three strong factions within the Congress: 1) a core that adhered

⁵²Sykes to Hoare, 14 Apr 1932, Sykes Papers, vol. 4.

⁵³See Chapter III, pp.76-78, below.

⁵⁴Leader, 19 & 26 Jul 1933.

⁵⁵FR, Madras, 1st half of Aug 1933.

to the Gandhiite leadership, 2) a vociferous group of socialists who looked to Jawaharlal Nehru for leadership, and 3) the great majority of the Congress who felt that both the socialists and the Gandhiites were diverting the Congress from its political goals.⁵⁶ In March 1934, after a meeting with members of the group favoring a new Congress Swarajya Party, Gandhi said he would oppose any immediate revival of constitutionalism but would take steps to reactivate the Congress in the coming summer.⁵⁷

In fact the situation came to a head rather more quickly than Gandhi had hoped. The Maharashtrian leader N.C. Kelkar and other Congress conservatives formed the Democratic Swaraj Party which by mid-March was beginning to open district branches in Bombay Presidency.⁵⁸ In early April Congressmen hoping to revive the Congress Swarajya Party were claiming to represent the Congress itself. The larger Congress organization, they said, was defunct.⁵⁹ However, by their constant efforts to woo the Mahatma, they tacitly admitted that they did not have much chance of doing well in any future election without Gandhi's approval. On 7 April 1934 Gandhi bowed to the inevitable and requested all Congressmen "to suspend Civil Resistance for Swaraj." He said that the demonstrators had done well but had not "touched the hearts of the terrorists or of the rulers as a class." Civil disobedience, he said, "should be revived in my lifetime only under my direction unless one arises claiming to know the science better than I do."⁶⁰

In what was perhaps a more significant move, Gandhi had, three days earlier, given his sanction to the revival of the Swarajya Party, which put enormous pressure on the Congress at large to withdraw C.D. and resume legal status.⁶¹ Within two weeks the Government of India removed legal restrictions on the Congress to allow the A.I.C.C. to meet and ratify Gandhi's statement of April 7th.⁶² On 18 May the committee met in Patna and officially called off the moribund civil disobedience movement.⁶³

Leftists--radicals, Marxists, socialists, and revolutionary nationalists--represented a very active if comparatively small section of the Congress. During the civil disobedience movement they had been

⁵⁶Ibid., U.P., 2nd half of Oct 1933.

⁵⁷Ibid., Bombay, 1st half of Mar 1934.

⁵⁸Ibid., 2nd half of Mar 1934.

⁶⁰IAR, 1934, vol.1, p.26.

⁶²IAR, 1934, vol.2, p.26.

⁵⁹Leader, 4 Apr 1934.

⁶¹Leader, 7 Apr 1934.

⁶³Ibid., pp.286-89.

the first to be arrested and the last to be released. They were obvious targets of the C.I.D. They shouted loudly and they talked of revolution. The Communist revolution in Russia was neither so far away nor so deep in the past as to be forgotten by either the defenders of the Raj or by its most radical attackers. Both groups were well aware of the striking parallels between Tsarist Russia and Imperial India. Sir Malcolm Hailey, writing to a friend in England, expressed his fears for the future of the Raj:⁶⁴

The Czarist regime produced a somewhat servile population which provided an excellent field for exploitation by the Leninite directorate of intellectuals. Our own rule in India, though dissimilar in very many ways, has at the same time produced a population which hitherto has been very ready to accept authority, and clearly Jawahar Lal and some of his friends are hoping that they in their turn may establish a kind of Leninite directorate which will utilize the field we have prepared for them.

Though the Raj was able to keep some of the men it feared either in jail or in enforced exile, it was forced to leave at large at the end of C.D. a number of Congress leftists. Like the swarajists, the leftists were quick to take advantage of their freedom of movement and association. A group of Congress socialists who had been interned together at Nasik Road Central Prison formed the nucleus of the All-India Congress Socialist Party which had its first general meeting in Patna on 17 May 1934.⁶⁵ There had been earlier evidence of socialist activity in the Congress. A group of socialists had met at the time of the Poona conference (July 1933) to appoint a committee to prepare a draft constitution for a socialist party in the Congress.⁶⁶ There were Congress socialist groups in Patna, Bombay, Benares, and Kerala before 1934.⁶⁷ But the May meeting in Patna is generally cited as the formation of the C.S.P., although its first official annual conference was not held until October 1934.

The socialists who gathered at Patna were not of a single mind as to the strategy that Congress should pursue. While all could agree

⁶⁴Hailey to C.E. Newman, 20 Oct 1932, Hailey Papers, vol.25.

⁶⁵For a brief sketch of the early development of the C.S.P., see M.R. Masani, The Communist Party of India (London, 1954), pp.52-3. A more detailed analysis can be found in T. Rusch, "Role of the Congress Socialist Party . . .," pp.1-98. See also the relevant chapters in Z. Masani, "Radical Nationalism."

⁶⁶Purshottamdas Tricumdas to J.P. Narayan, N.D. [1933], Narayan Papers, file 13.

⁶⁷Sampurnanand, Memories and Reflections, p.72.

on a general socialist program, not all could agree on the methods of its implementation. Socialists from the U.P. and Bihar expressed dismay at the calling off of civil disobedience and at what they termed growing constitutionalism. A group of U.P. socialists had unsuccessfully sponsored a motion of no confidence in Gandhi at an April meeting of the U.P. Provincial Congress Committee.⁶⁸ Narendra Deva, in his presidential address at the Patna conference, criticised Congressmen who seemed to be intent on holding office under the Government of India Act.⁶⁹

Socialists from the Bombay and Marahashtra areas who may have felt they could win an appreciable number of seats in a future legislative assembly, favored what M.R. Masani called "electoral activity;" but they did not actually propose that the Congress accept office in future provincial governments.⁷⁰ After much debate the Patna conference adopted a resolution favoring participation in elections but maintaining that there would be no acceptance of office without a specific decision of the entire Congress.⁷¹ This was not an issue the socialists wished to leave to the Gandhiite Working Committee or to the A.I.C.C. The Patna conference appointed an eleven-man committee to draft a constitution incorporating the following principles: 1) all power to the producing masses, 2) a state-developed and controlled economy; 3) a state monopoly on foreign trade, 4) the nationalization of principal industries, 5) the elimination of princes and landlords, 6) the redistribution of land to the peasants, 7) cooperative farming with a view to eventual collectivization, 8) the liquidation of peasants' and workers' debts, and 9) a functional adult franchise.⁷²

The socialists, by forming their party within the Congress, admitted what the swarajists had admitted before them, that the Congress was the most powerful political organization in opposition to British rule and that any party formed outside the Congress had little chance

⁶⁸FR, U.P., 2nd half of Apr 1934.

⁶⁹Narendra Deva, Socialism and the Nationalist Revolution (Bombay, 1946), p.27.

⁷⁰Resolution by M.R. Masani, IAR, 1934, vol.1, p.340.

⁷¹Ibid., p.341.

⁷²Notes on the C.S.P. constitution, AICC file G23 of 1934-35. The term "functional franchise" was intended to describe a system whereby political constituencies would be created according to the occupation or "social class" of the voter rather than according to his home district. J.P. Narayan used the term often in his writings and speeches.

of success in either constitutional or extra-constitutional activity. And, too, many Congress socialists were Congressmen first and socialists second. They had "grown up" in the Congress, had joined the independence movement as workers in the Gandhite cause, and would have been reluctant to leave the organization. The socialists left the Patna meeting at least tacitly agreed that their best policy required them to work within the existing framework of the Congress and that this policy required the acquiescence of Gandhi.

On 25 May, a week after the Patna meeting, M.R. Masani spoke to Gandhi about the C.S.P. program. Gandhi said that his objection to western socialism was that it was based on violence, on the coercion of those who opposed it. Gandhi advised Masani to be patient, to try to win over his opponents with non-violence. The Indian peasant did not understand or appreciate the jargon of Marxism, said Gandhi; rather, he (the peasant) had to be awakened to a knowledge of his rights and allowed to act on that knowledge. Gandhi also objected to what he felt was the socialists' emphasis on urban, industrial problems (here he took up Masani's mention of the Russian practice of weighting urban votes over rural votes) which, he said, could hardly apply to India. In closing, Gandhi told Masani that, except for the methods they favored, there was not much difference between them: "Both of us desire the welfare of the starving millions."⁷³

On 13 June 1934 the Working Committee passed a resolution criticizing socialist rhetoric. The committee welcomed the formation of differing groups in the Congress but reminded Congressmen that the Karachi resolution on fundamental rights did not justify any "loose talk" about class war and the confiscation of private property. The Congress did contemplate a "wiser and juster use of private property" but could not accept the use of terms that were "contrary to the Congress creed of non-violence." Having administered this rebuke, the Gandhites assured Congress members that they had no intention of playing down the Karachi resolution; a condensed version would be printed on each Congressman's membership receipt.⁷⁴

The socialist reaction to the "loose talk" resolution was not long in coming. On 21 June a group of C.S.P. members denounced the Congress leadership and said that the resolution would never have been

⁷³As recorded by Mahadev Desai, CWMG, vol.58, pp.27-8.

⁷⁴IAR, 1934, vol.1, pp.300-1.

passed if Jawaharlal had been there. The Working Committee, they said, was not interested in the welfare of the people but in replacing their white rulers with brown ones.⁷⁵ A more-restrained reaction to the resolution came from C.S.P. leaders Sri Prakasa, J.P. Narayan, and Sampurnanand. On 22 June, in a statement issued from Benares, they expressed pained surprise at what they called a deliberately-offensive attack on the C.S.P. Socialists, they said, did not talk of confiscation of property or of class war; rather, they sought progressive socialization of the means of production, distribution, and exchange of wealth. The gradual abolition of private property would occur only in the spheres named. They did not advocate the abolition of all private property. Class war, they said, was an ever-present adjunct of capitalism; it was not created by the socialists. The three said they awaited most happily the Working Committee's elaboration of their plans for a "wiser, more-just use of private property."⁷⁶

Just as the C.S.P. leaders toned down the reaction of their more-radical followers, the Gandhiites took steps to accommodate the C.S.P. On 1 July Gandhi hosted a meeting of Congress socialists from Gujerat at the Harijan Ashram at Sabarmathi. He again said he welcomed them into the Congress, if they agreed to non-violence. He urged them to go out and work among the peasants and to educate them to their program.⁷⁷ A few days earlier Gandhi told a group of workers' representatives that they could not destroy capitalism without destroying their own livelihood. He said that the poor had a wealth of strength, of their own capital, which they could tap by following the Gandhian program, by keeping themselves pure and avoiding violence, the use of intoxicants, etc. Gandhi said that the capitalists had made good use of their strength but that the workers had frittered theirs away.⁷⁸

At the end of July 1934, the Working Committee published a clarification of the "loose talk" resolution, saying they had not intended to criticize any particular party or its program but only meant to censure the actions of certain individuals.⁷⁹ In response to a critical letter from Jawaharlal, Gandhi elaborated on his feelings about the resolution and about the Congress socialists:⁸⁰

⁷⁵FR, Bombay, 2nd half of Jun 1934.

⁷⁶IAR, 1934, vol.1.

⁷⁷Ibid., p.25.

⁷⁸Bombay Chronicle, 30 Jun 1934.

⁷⁹IAR, 1934, vol.2, p.202.

⁸⁰Gandhi to Nehru, 17 Aug 1934, Nehru, Bunch of Old Letters (Bombay, 1958), pp.120-1.

Do read the resolution about "loose talk" dispassionately. There is not a word in it about socialism. Greatest consideration has been paid to the socialists some of whom I know so intimately. Do I not know their sacrifice? But I have found them as a body to be in a hurry. Why should they not be? Only if I cannot march quite as quick, I must ask them to halt and take me along with them. I have looked up the dictionary meaning of socialism. It takes me no further than where I was before I read the definition. What will you have me read to know its full content? I have read one of the books Masani gave me and now I am devoting all my spare time to reading the book recommended by Narendradev.

In an earlier letter to Narendra Deva, Gandhi had spelled out some objections he had to the C.S.P. platform. He felt that the party should not be called the "All-India Congress Socialist Party" without permission of the Congress but that "All-India Socialist Party of Congressmen" would be okay.⁸¹ Gandhi said he was sad not to see an acceptance of the Congress creed--the attainment of swaraj by all legitimate and peaceful means. He said that the goal of the Congress was to form an independent state, not to impose a pre-conceived form of government on that state. Socialist proposals to eliminate princes and landlords would lead to violence, said Gandhi, as would the socialists' refusal to negotiate constitutional issues with the British. Gandhi felt that "to each according to his needs" should read "to each according to his just needs." The Mahatma also deprecated the socialists' emphasis on their prediction of Jawaharlal's future plans. He told Narendra Deva that Jawaharlal would act very carefully when he was finally released from jail. Gandhi ended by advising the C.S.P. to adapt the socialist program to Indian conditions instead of trying to impose "scientific socialism," a foreign ideology, on India.⁸²

At about the same time Vallabhbhai Patel criticized the habit of Indian youth taking western ideas and twisting them to fit very different conditions in India. He said that he had nothing against the uplift of the peasants, he wanted to move towards that goal swiftly, but the C.S.P. would actually retard the progress of the Congress by admitting advocates of violence. Patel told the leaders of the C.S.P. that if they came up with a program that could be "realistically" followed

⁸¹The Gandhiites were much more adamant in their objection to the use of the name "Congress" by the break-away Nationalist Party formed by M.M. Malaviya and M.S. Aney who split with the old guard over their neutral policy towards the communal aware of 1932. Searchlight, 29 Aug 1934.

⁸²Gandhi to Narendra Deva, 2 Aug 1934, from a photostat in Tendulkar, Mahatma, vol.3, pp.344-45.

by the Congress, he would support it.⁸³

The C.S.P., however, had a difficult time developing a program that the majority of its members could agree to follow. They were not unaffected by the Gandhiite criticism that their ideology was a foreign one unsuited to Indian conditions. And they differed as to how it could be applied in their country. Like the Congress itself, the C.S.P. was composed of individuals who agreed on certain general goals but who could not agree on methods by which the desired goals could be achieved.

On 29 September 1934, the first issue of the C.S.P. weekly, the Congress Socialist, was published. The editor, R.M. Lohia, introduced the newspaper with a leader disclosing the party's intention to "dispossess the people of their communal and tribal selves," to promote class solidarity, and to encourage the organization of the masses. According to Lohia, peasants and workers were dissatisfied with the Gandhiite program, and their dissatisfaction led to their non-participation in the Congress struggle. The C.S.P. would correct this by providing within the Congress a forum for all "healthy and advanced political thought."⁸⁴

Despite a general agreement on the party's goals, political decisions of the C.S.P.'s Executive Committee often thwarted the ambitions of C.S.P. members who had influential positions in provincial political organizations. In the U.P., perhaps because of the influence of the still-absent Jawaharlal Nehru, C.S.P. members were in a strong position in the Provincial Congress Committee. At the end of September the president, four vice presidents, and seven of the eleven-member executive council of the P.C.C. belonged to the C.S.P. as did twenty-six of the forty-six representatives to the A.I.C.C.⁸⁵ A month later, on the eve of the Bombay Congress, eighteen C.S.P. members resigned from the party in protest to an executive committee ruling that they would have to give up Congress office.⁸⁶ U.P. socialists threatened to take the entire provincial party out of the C.S.P.⁸⁷

In Bombay C.S.P. members wanted to organize mill workers in competition with established labor unions, but the party leaders preferred to come to some arrangement with existing labor organizations.

⁸³Searchlight, 8 Aug 1934.

⁸⁵FR, U.P., 2nd half of Sep 1934.

⁸⁷Searchlight, 25 Oct 1934.

⁸⁴Congress Socialist, 29 Sep 1934.

⁸⁶Bombay Chronicle, 23 Oct 1934.

Narendra Deva suggested that C.S.P. members should, in the beginning, act as "auxiliaries of the veteran labour leaders" in the organization of urban workers on the understanding that these veteran labor leaders would leave the organization of peasants to the C.S.P.⁸⁸ C.S.P. leaders firmly believed that a cautious policy in respect to their leftist rivals and their Gandhiite opponents was the wisest course.

In Bihar the followers of the old guard who controlled the P.C.C. found it expedient to include a socialist, the peasant leader Swami Sahajanand, in the local Congress executive.⁸⁹ But the Gandhiites in Gujarat were not so generous. In a letter to the Congress Socialist, a local party worker explained the problem from his point of view: "Gujarat is awfully orthodox in every respect and it is an uphill task for us to clear the prejudices against us." The writer said socialists faced great opposition from conservative politicians but despite this had done some useful work in Ahmedabad, Dohad, Baroda, and Rajipipla. He said there had been an active socialist group in Gujarat since February 1933.⁹⁰ On 4 October, a few days after the above letter was published, Vallabhbhai Patel told the Gujarat P.C.C. that he would not tolerate socialist interference with the solid work done by him and his co-workers. He was, he said, "tired of paper programmes." As he spoke he was handed a Communist pamphlet which called him a friend of capitalism and an enemy of the farmers. He responded by saying that the Communists had "ruined Bombay" but that he would not allow them to succeed in Gujarat.⁹¹

Patel held strongly anti-socialist views. In the autumn of 1935, he and Bhulabhai Desai complained to Gandhi that the editorial policy of the Bombay Chronicle was too radical. They hinted that they would like to engineer the editor's, S.A. Brelvi's, removal. Gandhi told them that Brelvi had always been fairly objective, even if he was inclined to socialism. Gandhi added that it was very important to encourage the expression of differing points of view.⁹² The Mahatma insisted that the socialists be accommodated where accommodation did not endanger the Gandhiite program.

⁸⁸Congress Socialist, 29 Sep 1934.

⁸⁹FR, Bihar and Orissa, 2nd half of Sep 1934.

⁹⁰Congress Socialist, 29 Sep 1934. ⁹¹Bombay Chronicle, 4 Oct 1934.

⁹²Mahadev Desai to S.A. Brelvi, 26 Oct 1935, Brelvi Papers.

For a time it looked as if the C.S.P. might break its detente with the old guard and commit itself to an outright challenge to the Gandhiite leadership of the Congress. In February 1935 Congress socialists organized a boycott of a Congress swadeshi exhibition in Lucknow.⁹³ A month later C.S.P. members formed a "dehat sangh" (village society) in competition with the All-India Village Industries Association that Gandhi had so recently founded. But a British observer noted that the socialists had little success and were forced to move the organization's headquarters from Delhi to Meerut because of the great strength of the Gandhiites in the former city.⁹⁴

In February 1935 U.P. socialist Sampurnanand circulated a proposed plan of action among C.S.P. leaders. He disagreed with a moderate policy put forth by J.P. Narayan, the General Secretary of the Party. Sampurnanand said the C.S.P. could not "hope to capture the machinery of the Congress by purely parliamentary methods." He had a more-radical plan, designed to embarrass the Gandhiites:

Seeing that we form about one-third of the Congress, I believe the Government will not embarrass its own unofficial allies, the Working Committee, by declaring us unlawful, nor, I think, will the Working Committee do any such thing. But individuals will be picked up and punished by either side. Others must step into their places. I think if we are serious and manage to get together some funds we shall have organized the Peasantry and Labour . . . sufficiently to create a good atmosphere within the next six or seven months.

At that time, suggested Sampurnanand, the C.S.P. could precipitate a break with the Government of India over an issue of importance to the peasants and workers. If the Gandhiites joined the struggle they would be dropped by their conservative supporters. If they did not join the fight, they would be abandoned by the Indian masses. In either case, the C.S.P. would benefit: "We shall probably disappear as a party for something like two years, but when we return we shall have captured the machinery of the Congress, even if we do not happen to be in a numerical majority."⁹⁵

⁹³FR, U.P., 2nd half of Feb 1935.

⁹⁴Ibid., Delhi, 2nd half of Apr 1935.

⁹⁵Sampurnanand's "thesis" AICC file G23 of 1934.

Jayaprakash Narayan responded to Sampurnanand's "thesis" by maintaining, as he had earlier, that the C.S.P. should not set out to convert the Congress into an isolated, revolutionary cell but should help the Congress to become a more-effective anti-imperialist force.⁹⁶

Nothing can be worse than adopting such tactics as may divide the Congress into two hostile camps: Socialists and anti-Socialists. We should, on the contrary, try to take the militant nationalists with us and divide the Congress into the latter and compromising moderates.

Narayan's policy of avoiding a direct confrontation with the Gandhiites had been followed by the C.S.P. since its inception. Sampurnanand's proposals were officially rejected by the party at its Faizpur meeting (December 1936).⁹⁷ Sampurnanand left the C.S.P. and, in 1938, accepted a seat in the U.P. Congress ministry and served as education minister until October 1939.

The C.S.P. did not command enough followers to overthrow the Gandhiites in a direct fight for control of the Congress. However, it is difficult to give an approximation of the size of the party in proportion to the overall strength of the Congress. In June 1930 the Viceroy estimated that about five percent of Gandhi's followers were "Communist and revolutionary."⁹⁸ When civil disobedience ended and the Congress Socialist Party was formed, British estimates of the percentage of socialists in the Congress grew. In June 1934 Sir Malcolm Hailey, the Governor of the U.P., said C.I.D. reports indicated that about one-third of the leaders of the Congress were "controlled" by the C.S.P.⁹⁹ Later intelligence estimates made the Government of India fear that the C.S.P. was growing so quickly in the last six months of 1934 that it might eventually come to dominate the Congress itself.¹⁰⁰ And in February 1935 Sampurnanand based his call for a direct confrontation with the Gandhiites on the assumption that the C.S.P. included "about one-third of the Congress."¹⁰¹ If these estimates of the relative strength of the C.S.P. in 1934-35 were accurate, the fall in the

⁹⁶ Searchlight, 5 Jul 1935.

⁹⁷ CID (Poona) Report of 4 Jan 1937, L/P&J/8/637.

⁹⁸ Irwin to Benn, 2 Jun 1930, (L/P&J/6/1983) cited by Dennis Dalton, "Gandhi's Styles of Leadership," in B.N. Pandey (ed.), Leadership in South Asia (New Delhi, 1977), pp.612-13.

⁹⁹ Hailey to James Crerar, 14 Jun 1934, Hailey Papers, vol.27.

¹⁰⁰ See the reports and analyses in Home Pol., file 3/16 of 1934, and the note on the Bombay Congress, 27 Nov 1934, in L/P&J/7, file 1240 of 1934.

¹⁰¹ Sampurnanand's "thesis," AICC file G23 of 1934.

fortunes of the party over the next two years was indeed catastrophic. It is impossible to say, with any precision, when the C.S.P. reached a peak of influence, but it is evident that after 1936 internal disputes over the party's relations with the C.P.I. and with the followers of M.N. Roy weakened the C.S.P. considerably.¹⁰²

There are no figures for Congress membership from the outbreak of civil disobedience in 1932 until the Lahore Congress of April 1936. At Lahore the Congress claimed about 400,000 members. Eight months later, at the Faizpur Congress of December 1936, the Congress was reported to have had about 600,000 members. At the Haripura Congress of March 1938 the membership was put at over 3 million (see Tables 1-2, 1-3, and 1-4 above). Figures for the size of the C.S.P. in the same period are extremely sketchy, but those that do exist indicate that the membership of the party was miniscule compared to that of the Congress as a whole.

In February 1937 J.P. Narayan said the C.S.P. had about 2000 members.¹⁰³ In January 1938 the party had functioning branches in only eleven of the twenty-one Congress provinces and a combined, reported membership of 2520. Three other provincial branches failed to report because they were undergoing reorganization, and these were given additional time to report.¹⁰⁴ Reports from two of these three branches were submitted in June 1939,¹⁰⁵ but, in the meantime, two of the branches that had reported earlier (those in Bengal and Punjab) deserted the central organization, joining Subhas Bose's Forward Bloc in defiance of the executive committee's orders.¹⁰⁶ Thus, it seems unlikely that the C.S.P. had more than about 3000 members in June 1939.

¹⁰²For an analysis of the rivalry between the "Royists," the C.P.I., and the C.S.P. and of the effects of that rivalry on the C.S.P. see Z. Masani, "Radical Nationalism . . ." pp.231-62.

¹⁰³Circular letter, 8 Feb 1937, Narayan Papers, file 2.

¹⁰⁴Report of a C.S.P. executive committee meeting, 4-6 Jan 1938, *ibid.*, file 26. The eleven provincial branches and membership figures given were: Karnatak 255, Bengal 258, Punjab 559, Utkal 36, Bihar 170, Bombay 220, Tamil Nadu 255, Andhra 448, Delhi 48, N.W.F.P. 71, and Maharashtra 200. Party branches in Sind and Berar were said to have ceased to function. Branches in the U.P., Kerala, and Gujerat were given more time to report.

¹⁰⁵The Kerala and U.P. branches reported 400 and 535 members, respectively, *ibid.*, file 33.

¹⁰⁶Hindustan Standard, 21 Jun 1939, press cutting in the B.C. Roy Papers, part V, file 11.

In the early summer of 1939, the C.S.P. suffered the resignation of founder members M.R. Masani, Achyut Patwardhan, R.M. Lohia, and Ashok Mehta, all of whom disagreed with party policies towards the C.P.I. and the "United Front."¹⁰⁷ These resignations were followed by others at the local level. A party member from Utkal told J.P. Narayan that the C.S.P. was in danger of falling apart. He sent the resignations of six Utkal C.S.P. leaders who had been with the party since its formation.¹⁰⁸ The C.S.P. was not a very strong party in 1939, and there are indications that neither M.N. Roy's League of Radical Congressmen nor the C.P.I. were very much larger. There are no reliable statistics for either party in the period. But in December 1940 the League claimed to have 3500 members,¹⁰⁹ and two years later the C.P.I. was said to have 5000 members.¹¹⁰ The Congress itself had nearly 5 million members in 1939 (see Table 1-5 above). And at least one leftist organization probably had more members than the C.P.I., the C.S.P., and the "Royists"¹¹¹ combined. In 1939 the Girni Kamgar Union claimed to have 20,000 members.

There may have been a great potential for a socialist revolution in India, but leftist political parties in and on the periphery of the Congress were not very obviously benefitting from that potential. Such parties were a threat to the Gandhiite control of the Congress, not because of the number of members they could attract, but because they represented an ideology that the old guard found dangerous. During the period 1931 to 1939 a number of challenges to Gandhiite control of the Congress were mounted by political leaders claiming to represent a great, untapped leftist majority. Western socialism became an ideology of opportunity. It provided a cause on which anti-Gandhiite coalitions could be constructed. The Gandhiites had good reason to try to provide a place for socialism within the Congress without letting socialists gain great influence in Congress affairs. They wished to provide a safe outlet for a potentially-dangerous political force and to prevent its being used against them.

¹⁰⁷ Z. Masani, "Radical Nationalism . . . ," p.287.

¹⁰⁸ B.C. Panigrahi to J.P. Narayan, 23 Jul 1939, Narayan Papers, part I.

¹⁰⁹ J.P. Haithcox, Communism and Nationalism . . . , p.296.

¹¹⁰ Overstreet and Windmiller, p.166.

¹¹¹ P.C. Joshi to J.P. Narayan, 5 Sep 1939, Narayan Papers, file 2.

CHAPTER III

The Lure of Office: Congress Reaction to British Reform, 1929-34.

Politicians without hope or promise of political office are handicapped in the contest for broad-based popular support. In contrast, those who can offer the jobs, the contracts, and the patronage that come with office are at a distinct advantage in the quest for the hearts and minds of the masses. Even the most obdurate revolutionary understands the appeal of political office, no matter how lowly, no matter how circumscribed that office may be. British reforms, the Government of India Acts of 1919 and 1935, were a powerful inducement to some form of cooperation with the Raj. Those Indians who played the game received the gifts within the grant of the British masters of India.

At the same time, the Government of India Acts gave Congress leaders an effective tool with which to control local political organizations. By offering an association with the most powerful political party in India, by offering support in the competition for office, Congress leaders could exact local allegiance to the nationalist cause. When, in Madras, for instance, it was widely assumed that the Congress would eventually accept office under the 1935 Act, its power quickly overshadowed that of the Justice Party. The latter organization had been a major force in Madras politics but was unable to develop beyond its anti-Brahminical, anti-northern base.¹

The leaders of the Congress certainly understood the lure of office. Rajendra Prasad once contemplated an orthodox political career in his native Bihar. His family was well known and widely connected. As a student he was among the founders of youth and student associations in Calcutta and in Bihar. He said that at one time he considered representing Champaran (where he first worked with Gandhi) in the Bihar Legislative Council set up by the Montford reforms (*i.e.* under the 1919 Act). However, he gave up these plans in order to join Gandhi's non-cooperation movement in April 1920.² Jawaharlal Nehru, who had once held

¹See, David Arnold, "The Gounders and the Congress: Political Recruitment in South India, 1920-1937," in South Asia, no.4, Oct 1974, pp.1-20; and C.J. Baker, "The Congress at the 1937 Elections in Madras," Modern Asian Studies, vol.10, no.4, 1976, pp.557-89.

²Prasad, Autobiography (Bombay, 1957), chaps. 1-13.

municipal office, explained the appeal of the British reforms in terms of his desire to serve the country:³

The idea of my associating myself with the Government as a minister was unthinkable for me; indeed, it was hateful to me. But I have often yearned, then as well as in later years, for a chance to do some solid, positive, constructive work. Destruction and agitation and non-co-operation are hardly normal activities for human beings.

The temptation to accept and to work the British reforms was, indeed, a considerable force in Indian politics. And the very existence of the Acts and the associated electoral activity provided various minority parties with the opportunity to mount extensive political campaigns. They had different reasons, of course, for they might have no hope of gaining office, but they could not forego the opportunity to use the elections to attack their opponents who did. Congress leftists raged against the Acts but they consistently participated in the elections, standing for office on a platform which called for a rejection of the reforms and a refusal to form provincial ministries. They could attach to their conservative opponents who wanted office the stigma of collaboration. No nationalist politician could be seen to be co-operating in any scheme for the perpetuation of the British Raj.

Srinivas Iyengar was hardly a revolutionary; yet, in his presidential address to the 41st session of the Congress, (Gauhati, December 1926), he warned Congress-Swarajya Party members against participating in any coalition ministries under the 1919 Act. Iyengar said that since no provincial council had a majority of Congress Party members and since no coalition could hold office except on the sufferance of the Government of India, there could be no Congress ministries.⁴ Congress would participate in the elections as was agreed in the Calcutta pact,⁵ but Swarajya Party members were pledged to refuse to help form ministries or to vote for the passage of any budget until the A.I.C.C. was convinced the British were prepared to make a satisfactory response to the "national demand."⁶

By mid-May 1927, the Working Committee, "while adhering to the principle of non-acceptance of ministries," had relaxed the Gauhati restrictions enough to permit Congress-Swarajya Party members to co-operate with "responsible" ministries in the passage of progressive legislation where such action "in the judgement of the party," did not

³Nehru, Autobiography, p.102.

⁴IAR, 1926, vol.2, p.297.

⁵See Chapter I, p.17, above.

⁶Hindu (weekly), 6 Jan 1927.

tend to strengthen the Raj or any anti-national party.⁷ Within a few months, Congress radicals (members of the Independence for India League and others) were demanding action to be taken against elements of the Congress in Madras which they accused of cooperating with the "anti-national" Justice Party in order to form a coalition ministry in defiance of the Gauhati resolution. The Gandhiites managed to have the A.I.C.C., meeting in Calcutta on 28 October 1927, shelve the issue until the upcoming Madras session of the Congress.⁸ But the issue of office acceptance would not go away.

Gandhi was greatly helped in his efforts to hold the Congress together by the appearance in India of the Simon Commission. The British decision to send an investigating committee (without a single Indian member) to report to Parliament on the political situation in India, had the effect of uniting the Congress as no act of the Gandhiites could have done. The boycott and the black-flag demonstrations that met the Simon Commission as it toured the cities and towns of India fostered the growth of the nationalist spirit.⁹

Dyarchy, the system of reforms under the 1919 Act, was proving to be an insufficient inducement to draw a wide spectrum of Indian politicians into the working of the Raj. A cartoon in the Madras Hindu showed Sir Stanley Jackson, the Governor of Bengal, dressed as a surgeon, administering an injection (last minute election) to a dead patient (Dyarchy).¹⁰ By the beginning of the next decade, the British Labour Government under Ramsay Macdonald were preparing to abandon Dyarchy and to administer a further dose of reform. But Dyarchy died hard.

On 3 January 1930 Motilal Nehru called on all Congress Party members to resign their seats in the legislatures in accordance with the Lahore resolution (December 1929). The resignations were to be the first step in the Congress program of civil disobedience, but the response was not the immediate "aye aye" the Working Committee demanded. M.R. Jayakar, who had previously allied his Liberal Party with the Congress,¹¹ said that responsivist Liberals would not resign from the provincial councils or from the Central Legislative Assembly.¹² Nine

⁷ IAR, 1927, vol.1, p.13.

⁸ Hindu (weekly), 3 Nov 1927.

⁹ Even Indian Liberals boycotted the Simon Commission, Leader, 1 Jan 1929.

¹⁰ Hindu, 4 May 1929.

¹¹ Hindu (weekly), 27 Jan 1927.

¹² Leader, 8 Jan 1930.

Congress M.L.C.s from Madras sent letters of resignation to the Governor, asking that the resignations go into effect on 17 March, the day the session was scheduled to end. They were told they could not submit post-dated resignations.¹³

Others resigned and vowed to stand for reelection as independents, and still others refused to resign at all. The total number of Congress members of the legislative councils and of the Central Legislative Assembly who either refused to resign (as of the end of February) or who resigned and were later reelected as independents amounts to thirty-two percent of those holding office on 3 January (see Table 3-1 below). When, in early March, the Working Committee threatened to expel recalcitrant M.L.C.s and M.L.A.s from the Congress, the president, the general secretary, and two other prominent members of the Tamil Nadu P.C.C. resigned from that Congress body.¹⁴

TABLE 3-1: The Response to the Lahore Resolution.¹⁵

| Congressmen in Provincial Councils as of 3 Jan 1930 | | Remaining in Office as of <u>31 Jan 1930</u> <u>28 Feb 1930</u> | | Resigned and Reelected as <u>Independents</u> |
|---|-----|---|----|---|
| Madras | 35 | 20 | 18 | 4 |
| Bombay | 16 | 9 | 9 | 0 |
| Bengal | 47 | 9 | 9 | 0 |
| U.P. | 22 | 8 | 6 | 1 |
| Punjab | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Burma | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Bihar & Orissa | 35 | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| C.P. | 17 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Assam | 16 | 6 | 5 | 2 |
| <u>Legislative Assembly</u> | 34 | 9 | 7 | 7 |
| <u>Council of State</u> | 9 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Totals | 233 | 67 | 60 | 14 |

It should be noted that Congressmen were not being asked to give up all elective offices. At the Lahore Congress, the Gandhiites, who had defeated all other attempts to amend the Lahore resolution, allowed

¹³Viceroy to SoS, 12 Feb 1930, L/P&J/6/1995.

¹⁴FR, Madras, 1st half of Feb 1930.

¹⁵Compiled from information in L/P&J/6/1995, file 400.

Congress members to retain seats on local bodies, such as municipal councils and district boards.¹⁶ This was a very material concession to the conservatives. Municipal councils and local boards were of great importance to politicians building the Congress organization at the provincial and local levels. In fact, local office may well have been more important than provincial or national office under the 1919 Act.¹⁷

It had been difficult to exercise control over the actions of Congress members in the legislative councils and in the assembly under the 1919 Act; it would be more difficult to closely supervise Congress members who might be running provincial governments if new reforms then under discussion in London actually came to fruition. In light of the events that followed the Lahore resolution, it behooved the Gandhites to take steps to see that Congress members in future legislative assemblies and Congress ministers could be made to obey the directives of the Congress high command. But before they could take such steps, the Gandhites had to strengthen their grip on the Congress itself.

While civil disobedience was in progress, the Congress was led by a succession of "dictators." In May 1930 the Working Committee conferred on Motilal Nehru (the acting president) all powers of the Committee whenever it was, in his judgement, impossible or undesirable to call a meeting of the members. He was also given the authority to nominate a successor who would have the same powers.¹⁸ Each P.C.C. appointed a similar "dictator" to direct local Congress activities. When the first phase of civil disobedience ended with the Gandhi-Irwin pact, Vallabhbhai Patel was appointed Congress president for the Karachi session, and the old Working Committee and A.I.C.C. were kept intact, since it was decided that, in the circumstances, elections could not be held.¹⁹ After the Gandhi-Irwin pact broke down and C.D. was resumed at the end of 1931,

¹⁶ Hindu, 30 Dec 1929.

¹⁷ I discuss the importance to the Bengal Congress of Calcutta corporation offices in Chapter VII below. See also C.J. Baker, Politics of South India, 1920-1937 (London, 1976) for a discussion of the importance of the Madras district boards to the Congress organizations in that presidency.

¹⁸ IAR, 1930, vol.2, p.438. The "dictators" for 1930 included: J. Nehru, M. Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, A.K. Azad, M.A. Ansari, C. Khaliqzaman, J. Nehru (on release from jail), J.M. Sen-Gupta, Vallabhbhai Patel (on release from jail), and K.M. Munshi. Leader 11, 22, 23 & 30 Oct and 10 Dec 1930.

¹⁹ Bombay Chronicle, 3 Feb 1931.

the system of Congress "dictators" was again adopted. Thus, during the whole of the civil disobedience period the Congress (or, rather, such Congress machinery as survived British repression) was at least nominally controlled by the Gandhites or by their appointees.²⁰

By the spring of 1933 the enthusiasm that had characterized the early phase of civil disobedience was waning swiftly. The illegal 47th Indian National Congress session at Calcutta (March 1933) was a lack-luster affair. Sir John Tyson, the secretary of the Governor of Bengal, said that it consisted of a few leaders and a few hundred hirelings from various parts of India. He said they had been provided with single-fare rail tickets to the city, because it was expected that their jail terms would outlast the validity of return tickets.²¹ Approximately 900 demonstrators were arrested.²² In early March M.S. Aney, the then Congress "dictator," participated in secret talks with conservative leaders M.R. Jayakar, N.C. Kelkar, and others. The Bombay Chronicle speculated that Aney was being pressed to withdraw C.D. and noted that the Government of India turned down Aney's request to be allowed to interview Gandhi and other Working Committee members in prison.²³

On 27 March T.B. Sapru hosted a meeting of leading Congress moderates (M.M. Malviya, M.S. Aney, A.K. Azad, and C. Rajagopalachari were among those attending) to discuss the recently-published White Paper.²⁴ On 8 April the Bombay Chronicle claimed that the government had consulted Gandhi on the effect of the proposed reforms and that Gandhi had written to the Viceroy, saying he was ready to use his influence to bring about a settlement if the government were willing to make some gesture of peace.²⁵ The Home Member of the Viceroy's Council, Sir Harry Haig, was quick to deny that the government had ever asked for Gandhi's opinion of the White Paper or that Gandhi had written to the Viceroy or had in any other manner given his views on the subject to the government.²⁶ The letter was almost certainly a hoax. It was filled

²⁰ During the second phase of C.D., the British often accused Congress leaders of putting up nonentities as provincial "dictators" in order that the real leaders of the provincial Congress could carry out the Congress campaign and prepare political bases for a future election. FR, Madras, 2nd half of Jan 1932.

²¹ Tyson to his family, 2 Apr 1933, Tyson Papers.

²² FR Bengal, 2nd half of Mar 1933.

²³ Bombay Chronicle, 13 Mar 1933.

²⁴ Ibid., 27 Mar 1933.

²⁵ Ibid., 8 Apr 1933.

²⁶ Ibid., 12 Apr 1933.

with awkward phrases, elaborate circumlocutions, and extensive subordinate clauses which are the antithesis of Gandhi's forthright (not to say blunt) style:²⁷

The Pact which the late Viceroy did me the honour of signing with me placing the seal of friendship on the relations between our two countries, indicates the major basis on which the Congress, which at Karachi accepted the Pact, could work a provisional Government on the definite assumption of future Dominion Status with substance of Independence.

The letter appeared just as Congress conservatives were mounting a campaign for the end of civil disobedience and for Congress participation in future elections under the Government of India Act. In the last week of April it was announced that those Working Committee members who were not in jail were planning to hold an informal meeting to discuss the political situation.²⁸ At this point Gandhi stepped in with a dramatic telegram that was (for a few weeks at least) to steal the limelight from any premature talk of cooperation with the government:²⁹

FOR REASONS WHOLLY UNCONNECTED WITH GOVERNMENT AND SOLELY CONNECTED WITH HARIJAN MOVEMENT AND OBEDIENCE PEREMPTORY CALL FROM WITHIN RECEIVED ABOUT MIDNIGHT, I HAVE TO TAKE TWENTY-ONE DAYS UNCONDITIONAL FAST WITH WATER, SODA, AND SALT BEGINNING FROM NOON 8TH MAY NEXT; ENDING NOON 29TH MAY. FAST MIGHT HAVE COMMENCED AT ONCE BUT FOR MY BEING PRISONER AND MY ANXIETY TO ENABLE LOCAL AUTHORITY RECEIVE NECESSARY INSTRUCTIONS FOR ARRANGEMENTS DURING FAST AND AVOID ALL POSSIBLE EMBARRASSMENT TO GOVERNMENT.

From the beginning of his jail term, Gandhi had involved himself in a program to bring attention to the plight of India's untouchables (harijans). In March 1932, when the concept of separate electorates for the "scheduled classes" was mooted by the Secretary of State, Gandhi warned Sir Samuel Hoare that he would resist such a move with all the power of his being.³⁰ In September 1932 Gandhi began a "fast unto death" in an attempt to force leaders of the harijans and leaders of caste Hindu groups to agree to a compromise whereby the harijans could participate in the elections as members of the general population. After five days of Gandhi's fast, Hindu and depressed-class leaders agreed to a system that would give harijans reserved seats in the legislatures without separate electorates. Two days later Gandhi ended his fast when, on 26

²⁷Ibid., 8 Apr 1933.

²⁸Ibid., 26 & 27 Apr 1933.

²⁹Gandhi to GoI, 1 May 1933, Sykes Papers, vol.5. I have added punctuation.

³⁰Gandhi to Hoare, 11 Mar 1932, ibid., vol.4.

September 1932, the British Government agreed to abide by the settlement (the Poona pact).³¹

The subsequent twenty-one day fast of 8 May 1933 was described by the Mahatma as an effort to "purify myself and my associates for greater vigilance and watchfulness in connection with the Harijan cause."³² He had earlier denied that his harijan work had to do with C.D. per se or (by implication) that it was intended to support either the conservatives who wanted C.D. called off or the radicals who wanted it intensified.³³ British observers, however, reported that some Congressmen were greatly perturbed at the public attention given Gandhi's anti-untouchability campaign, and that they had been pressing him to make some clear statement as to whether or not the C.D. movement would continue unabated.³⁴ But whatever Gandhi's intention, his penance on behalf of the harijans had an immediate political effect.

Gandhi was now assured of twenty-one days of headlines; Gandhi Overcomes Exhaustion, Doctors Keeping Hourly Vigil, Mahatma Says He Does Not Want to Die, Bapu Will Not Desert India In Her Hour Of Need, etc. Almost immediately after Gandhi announced his intention to fast, M.S. Aney postponed the planned meeting of Congress leaders for an indefinite period.³⁵ On 8 May Gandhi began his fast, was released from jail, and requested Aney to temporarily suspend C.D.³⁶ He also demanded the release of C.D. prisoners and later implied that C.D. could only be totally withdrawn if the Working Committee were allowed to meet and discuss the situation.³⁷

In June the leader of the Delhi Congress, Asaf Ali, told Gandhi that he had followed the Mahatma for fifteen years but that now he felt Gandhi was losing touch with the will of the masses. Ali said that 100 million Indians were willing to follow any movement which could realistically promise a higher standard of living, but that Gandhi was demanding

³¹ Sykes to Willingdon, 26 Sep 1932, ibid. When caste Hindu representatives later attempted to repudiate the pact, saying they'd been coerced into signing, Dr. Ambedkar, the leader of the untouchables, said that if anyone had been coerced it had been he. If Gandhi had died, said Ambedkar, Indian untouchables would have carried the stain just as European Jews did for their alleged role in the death of Christ. Ambedkar to Lord Lothian, 7 Feb 1934, Lothian Papers, vol.170.

³² Note on Gandhi's fasts, 1 Aug 1942, L/P&J/8/600.

³³ Press release, 10 Jan 1933, Sykes Papers, vol.5.

³⁴ FR, Bombay, 1st half of Jan 1933.

³⁵ Bombay Chronicle, 7 May 1933.

³⁶ Ibid., 9 May 1933.

³⁷ Ibid., 9 Jun 1933.

too much of them in the way of sacrifices. Ali asked for a five-year respite from C.D. during which period the Congress could attempt to bring about a better life for all Indians by working within the scope of the proposed reforms.³⁸

Men are moved by the hope of immediate gains or the fear of immediate losses only, [at such times] they may sacrifice even life impulsively. Exceptions apart, they will not agree to undergo a long course of quasi-religious austerities or suffering in the hope of a distant advantage. The cultured or the well-fed can afford to be idealists, but the starving semi-educated have neither the stamina nor the vision.

It was imperative for the Mahatma to give the appearance of being in control of the Congress at this time. If the leftists, the non-cooperators, seemed to be running the show, the conservatives might bolt and attempt to work the reforms by themselves. If the conservatives seemed to be getting their way too readily, the leftists might try to take the Congress into an all-out war with the Government of India. Either of these contingencies would have meant the end of Gandhi's program and would have threatened Gandhiite leadership of the Congress. The issue came to a head at the long-delayed Congress-leaders conference now scheduled to begin in Poona on 12 July 1933.

It was announced that more than 350 Congress leaders had been invited to Poona to attend the conference.³⁹ Even before the conference began, however, opponents of the proposal to call off C.D. were claiming that Aney had 1) been canvassing for the withdrawal of C.D. and was 2) ineligible to preside over a special meeting of the Congress because he was an appointed "dictator." C.D. could only be ended by a duly-elected president, they said.⁴⁰

Aney said that he had not been trying to persuade Congressmen to call off C.D. and that he was acting as a coordinator of Congress opinion not as a dictator. He said he had discussed the matter privately with other leaders and had, with them, decided to call the Poona conference.⁴¹ The leftists thereupon charged that Aney, instead of calling a general meeting of A.I.C.C. members, had selected 350 leaders he knew would be sure to oppose a continuation of C.D. The meeting was fixed, they said, and could not be binding on the Congress.⁴² It was now more important than ever that Gandhi gain some concession from the government before calling off C.D. Without that the Congress leftists were liable to attempt to split the Congress.

³⁸ Mahratta, 2 Jul 1933.

⁴⁰ Leader, 12 Jul 1933.

³⁹ Bombay Chronicle, 9 Jul 1933.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 13 Jul 1933.

British observers, reporting on the first day of the conference, said that an overwhelming majority of the delegates favored an end to C.D.⁴³ The Bombay Chronicle reported that twelve of the first thirteen speakers adamantly demanded an unconditional withdrawal of civil disobedience.⁴⁴ On the second day J.B. Kripalani, and others, asked the Congress to demand some sign of willingness to compromise from the British before giving up the fight.⁴⁵ They were backing Gandhi's request that the conference allow him to approach the Viceroy on their behalf. In the end Gandhi persuaded the delegates to appoint him as their representative for talks with the Viceroy. If the talks did not lead to an honorable settlement, said Gandhi, C.D. would be resumed.⁴⁶

On 14 July Gandhi sent a telegram to the Viceroy's secretary, asking for a meeting with Lord Willingdon without preconditions.⁴⁷ Three days later, the Viceroy's secretary told the Mahatma that, since it appeared from various reports that Gandhi intended to revive C.D. if the talks did not end in a manner that suited him, he could hardly describe his request as one without preconditions. The Government of India would have no dealings with an unconstitutional and illegal organization or with its representative.⁴⁸ Talks would not occur until C.D. was called off unconditionally. Gandhi's reaction was one of "painful surprise." He said he had not expected the government to take official notice of the non-authorized publication of the "confidential proceedings of an informal conference."⁴⁹

Congressmen who wanted to stop the C.D. movement were unhappy with the outcome of the Mahatma's request. Even before the Poona conference began, it was alleged, in an Associated Press release on 11 July, that Gandhi had already asked for an unconditional interview with the Viceroy and had been turned down.⁵⁰ If this were true, then Gandhi, in going to the delegates to ask their permission to contact the Viceroy without telling them of the earlier request, was perpetrating a hoax, was giving the conservatives the appearance of a fair trial on a brief

⁴³FR, Bombay, 1st half of Jul 1933.

⁴⁴Bombay Chronicle, 13 Jul 1933.

⁴⁵Leader, 16 Jul 1933.

⁴⁶Bombay Chronicle, 15 Jul 1933.

⁴⁷Gandhi to PSV, 14 Jul 1933, CWMG, vol.50, p.264.

⁴⁸PSV to Gandhi, 17 Jul 1933, ibid.

⁴⁹Gandhi to PSV, 17 Jul 1933, ibid.

⁵⁰Hindustan Times, 11 Jul 1933.

that had already failed. At least one modern historian supports this contention,⁵¹ but it does not appear to be true.

On 11 July 1933 the day of the A.P. release and two days before the conference gave Gandhi permission to ask for an interview, Lord Willingdon wrote to Sir Samuel Hoare, telling him that despite press reports to the contrary, he had not received any request for an interview from Gandhi and had not refused to see Gandhi: "This report is entirely unfounded as no such request has been made, and it is being contradicted in the press out here."⁵² It can, perhaps, be argued that Gandhi was, in effect, perpetrating a fraud on the Poona delegates in the sense that he had reason to believe Willingdon would turn him down. Gandhi was a shrewd politician and might have concluded that, at a time when the home government was trying to push Indian reform measures through a reluctant Parliament, the Government of India would not effect another "Gandhi-Irwin pact" and give Winston Churchill and his allies ammunition for a charge that the empire was being given away at the threats of a "half-naked fakir." And Willingdon, while officially defending the government's policy, had made no secret of the dim view he took of his predecessor's handling of the Congress. Willingdon had been especially harsh in his denunciation of the pact.⁵³ Willingdon's attitude, however, was not something Gandhi had to hide from the other delegates; they were well aware of the Viceroy's feelings on the matter.

Gandhi had, in fact, taken steps to sound out the India Office on the possibility of talks with the Viceroy and had not been firmly rebuffed. The Secretary of State had actually asked the Viceroy not to discourage the Mahatma. On 19 June, directly after he ended his harijan fast, Gandhi sent a telegram to his friend Agatha Harrison, the secretary of the India Conciliation Group, a largely-Quaker organization lobbying for Indian reforms. He said: "When health permits, courting interview; for my part there will be no conditions."⁵⁴ In London, Miss Harrison

⁵¹B.R. Tomlinson, "Nationalism and Indian Politics: The Indian National Congress, 1934-42," unpublished PhD thesis, Cambridge, 1974, pp.85-86. Tomlinson cites a letter from PSV to Gandhi, 7 Jul 1933. This may be a mis-dated copy of the letter actually written on 17 July.

⁵²Willingdon to Hoare, 11 Jul 1933, Templewood Papers, vol.12.

⁵³Sir John Tyson said that the Viceroy was wont to rail against the acts of his predecessor at dinner parties and other semi-public functions. From a letter written on the occasion of Willingdon's funeral, Tyson to his family, 17 Aug 1941, Tyson Papers.

⁵⁴Gandhi to Harrison, 19 Jun 1933, ICG Papers, box 45.

showed the telegram to friends in the India Office and to friends in Parliament. She was assured that the contents were made known to the Secretary of State for India.⁵⁵

The Viceroy had decided in mid-May, when Gandhi announced his intention to fast, that conservatives in the Congress would be able to force the Mahatma to end civil disobedience.⁵⁶ Willingdon wanted to be able to announce that he would not see Gandhi until C.D. was ended unconditionally. The Secretary of State, however, did not want to give such an ultimatum to the Mahatma. During the first week of July, he told Willingdon that emphasizing such a policy at that time would greatly embarrass the government which was already having trouble with its Liberal allies in Parliament.⁵⁷ On 11 July Hoare told the Viceroy that Gandhi would never renounce C.D. as a religious or philosophical belief but that he might be appealed to as a realistic politician to give it up for the present. Hoare asked Willingdon to try to avoid any public confrontation with the Mahatma until after the scheduled debate on the India Bill in Parliament on Monday the 17th of July.⁵⁸ As it happened, Gandhi's request for talks with the Viceroy was received on 14 July, was followed by two days of telegraphic consultation between Willingdon and Hoare, and was answered on 17 July. Thus, news of the rejection of Gandhi's request was not made public until the 18th of July, the day after the Parliamentary debates.

On 18 July 1933 Gandhi announced that he had asked Aney to suspend mass civil disobedience. It was to be replaced by individual civil disobedience, and Gandhi hinted that he was himself preparing to carry out one such symbolic action. Gandhi also asked that the Congress committees which had resumed operation since the worst days of repression be dissolved and that, for the immediate future, Congress be run by the "all-India dictator" and by the various provincial "dictators."⁵⁹ Four days later M.S. Aney carried out Gandhi's advised measures, dissolving the A.I.C.C. and other Congress committees and suspending mass civil disobedience, "for the time being."⁶⁰ As Gandhi told Nehru a few months later,

⁵⁵Harrison to Lord Allen and to W.D. Croft, 20 Jun 1933, and Croft to Harrison, 21 Jun 1933, *ibid.*, boxes 47 & 48.

⁵⁶Willingdon to Hoare, 15 May 1933, Templewood Papers, vol.6.

⁵⁷Hoare to Willingdon, 6 & 7 Jul 1933, *ibid.*, vols. 12 & 3. He had earlier asked Willingdon to play down the fact of Gandhi's release from prison (during the fast), because the release would anger reactionaries in the Parliament. Hoare to Willingdon, 7 May 1933, *ibid.*, vol.12.

⁵⁸Hoare to Willingdon, 11 Jul 1933, Templewood Papers, vol.12.

⁵⁹*Leader*, 20 Jul 1933.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 26 Jul 1933.

in September 1933, individual civil disobedience was the most that could be gotten out of the Congress at the time. And even that might have been in jeopardy if Congress committees were left intact to vote on the issue. According to Gandhi, had Aney not ended mass civil disobedience and had he failed to disband the Congress committees, "the whole movement of civil resistance would have collapsed through growing internal weakness."⁶¹ But Gandhi had not been quite so frank in his public statements made in July when mass C.D. was actually called off.

In comments on Aney's press statement, Gandhi said that with the end of mass civil disobedience, individual Congress members could stand for office, but he asked those who were "inclined to participate" to wait for the reforms to be enacted before they committed themselves to a particular policy.⁶² Gandhi also explained why he had recommended the dissolution of all Congress committees. He said that British repression had caused these committees to be furtive and secret organizations. Now that mass C.D. was no longer necessary, these secret organizations were no longer necessary either; their continued existence would lead only to chaos.⁶³

In Bombay and elsewhere conservative Congress members charged that Gandhi's telegram asking for an interview with the Viceroy was sent amidst such publicity and was couched in such terms that the Viceroy could not fail to take it as a challenge to his authority. Gandhi, said his accusers, had made it almost impossible for the Viceroy to give a favorable response. Gandhi denied this at a press interview on 30 July. He said he had made no threat, implicit or implied, veiled or open, to resume C.D. if the Viceroy failed to respond to his offer of cooperation.⁶⁴

A series of reports from the provincial governments on the political situation in early August shows a general dissatisfaction in the local Congress organizations with the results of the Poona conference and with the recent actions taken by M.S. Aney. In Madras it was thought that the delegates, who had been among the leaders of the stop C.D. movement, had been cheated by Gandhi. In Delhi, C.P., Bihar and

⁶¹Gandhi to Nehru, 13 Sep 1933, Narayan Papers, no. 552.

⁶²Note on Gandhi's press statement of 26 Jul 1933, in L/P&J/7, file 2206 of 1933.

⁶³Bombay Chronicle, 30 Jul 1933.

⁶⁴Bombay Chronicle, 31 Jul 1933.

Orissa, and U.P. there was a split between those who wanted C.D. revived and those who wanted its complete withdrawal. Neither faction, according to the reports, was satisfied with the moves made by Gandhi and Aney.⁶⁵

In a report from Bombay, R.M. Maxwell, the Home Secretary, said that there was among orthodox Hindus a strong dislike for Gandhi's harijan work. He said this was particularly true in Maharashtra. Maxwell said that many Maharashtrian Hindus looked to leaders like the "Tilakite" N.C. Kelkar for a voice in national affairs. Kelkar's followers were, said Maxwell, anxious to build a political base in preparation for entering the legislatures. He quoted Kelkar as saying that the only reason the Poona conference had failed to withdraw C.D. unconditionally was that the Congress workers were personally loyal to Gandhi.⁶⁶ Kelkar and other leaders were implying that this personal loyalty was being severely tested.

Despite Gandhi's campaign for a strengthening of "individual civil disobedience," despite his arrest and subsequent fast in August 1933,⁶⁷ the spirit and enthusiasm that had characterized the movement's earlier phases could not be revived. During the month of October 1933 there were only 242 convictions for civil disobedience-connected offences in all of India, and the number of persons undergoing imprisonment for C.D. declined by about 500 in the same period.⁶⁸ At the height of the movement, eighteen months earlier, there had been slightly more than 30,000 C.D. prisoners in jail.⁶⁹ The number fell to about 9000 at the end of June 1933,⁷⁰ and rose again slightly in August after the Poona conference failed to lead to talks between Gandhi and the Viceroy. On 31 October 1933 there were 10,793 prisoners; four months later there were 1664.⁷¹ The government were convinced that C.D. was at an end and were releasing their prisoners accordingly. The Congress had, for all practical purposes, abandoned the movement. It only needed Gandhi's

⁶⁵ Reports on local reaction to the Poona conference, 2 to 5 Aug 1933, L/P&J/7, file 2206 of 1933.

⁶⁶ Maxwell to GoI (Home), 11 Aug 1933, Sykes Papers, vol.5. See also lead editorials in the Mahratta, 16 & 23 Jul 1933.

⁶⁷ Gandhi fasted for 8 days (16-23 August) ostensibly for facilities to carry out harijan work while he was in jail; the fast ended when he was released 12 months before the end of his sentence (notes on Gandhi's fasts, 1 Aug 1942, L/P&J/8/600). Gandhi then said he would no longer take a personal part in C.D. until August 1934.

⁶⁸ GoI(Home) to SoS, 19 Dec 1933, L/P&J/7, file 166 of 1933.

⁶⁹ Notes on C.D. prisoners, Templewood Papers, vol.77.

⁷⁰ Willingdon to Sykes, 27 Jun 1933, Sykes Papers, vol.5.

⁷¹ Notes on C.D. prisoners, Templewood Papers, vol.77.

formal acknowledgement of the fact and C.D. would be well and truly dead.

Gandhi was trying to reconcile the conflicting demands of various groups of Congressmen who, for the sake of analysis, can be divided into three broad, general categories. The first category consisted largely of conservatives who wanted to revive the Congress-Swarajya Party and to enter the legislatures under Gandhian leadership. The second contained both conservatives and proclaimed leftists, some of whom wanted to "capture the legislatures" and some of whom wanted to oppose any form of cooperation with the Raj, but all of whom were militant Hindus opposed to the communal award (i.e., to the British policy of passing special legislation for the protection of Muslim and other "under-represented" Indian communities). In the third category were the Congress socialists, who were themselves divided as to the wisdom of attempting to continue C.D. and as to whether or not the Congress should attempt to participate in constitutional activities under revised British statutes.

In November 1933 M.A. Ansari was contacted by the conservative Tamil Nadu Congress leader S. Satyamurti who had begun a branch of the Swarajya Party in Madras and who wanted Ansari's help in forming an All-India Congress Swarajya Party.⁷² Ansari had already begun work towards this end. By the end of 1933, Ansari, the conservative Bengali leader B.C. Roy, and Satyamurti had circulated letters among a number of conservative Congress groups and had received pledges of assistance from leaders in most Congress provinces. In addition, A.K. Azad, Sarojini Naidu, and Bhulabhai Desai supported the effort but were themselves unable to sign any of the circular letters because they were still members of the old Working Committee which had not yet officially ended civil disobedience.⁷³

In late March 1934 Dr. Ansari and other Congress conservatives announced their intention to revive the Swarajya Party in preparation for the upcoming elections to the Central Legislative Assembly. In April, just before he finally did call off civil disobedience, Gandhi wrote to Ansari,

⁷²Satyamurti to Ansari, 11 Nov 1933, Home Pol., file 4/19 of 1933.

⁷³Correspondence regarding the "stop C.D." movement, B.C. Roy Papers, part II, file 34. By March they had received indications of support from, among others, Asaf Ali (Delhi), K.F. Nariman (Bombay), and C. Khaliqazzaman, Mohenlal Saxena, and Sri Prakasa (U.P.). Sri Prakasa was an avowed socialist and joined the C.S.P. in May 1934 but withdrew shortly thereafter because of the C.S.P. stand against the acceptance of office.

welcoming the formation of the party and the decision to contest the elections. Gandhi said he had little faith in the legislatures, was of the same mind as in 1920 when the original Swarajya Party was formed, but he felt it was right that Congressmen who could not take part in civil disobedience and who had faith in the legislative process should have the opportunity to contest elections.⁷⁴ Ansari said that the Swarajya Party had never been formally disbanded and was now only being reorganized after a quiescent period. The revitalized party, he said, would continue to follow Congress policy as it had in the past and did not need the previous sanction of the A.I.C.C. to continue to exist.⁷⁵

Some members of the group that was shortly to form the Congress Socialist Party were critical of the Swarajya Party platform. M.R. Masani, attending the first Swarajya Party conference on 3 May 1934, called for the party to undertake "the organization of peasants and workers for the purpose of participating in the struggle against Imperialism and Indian vested interests allied with them [sic]." The motion was defeated by a vote of 40 to 26,⁷⁶ but Masani said he was heartened by the presence of a progressive element in the party as indicated by the closeness of the vote.⁷⁷ It is important to note that Masani was not objecting to participation in the elections.

On 9 May Rajendra Prasad, who was already being touted as the next Gandhiite president of the Congress, said that the A.I.C.C. at its next meeting later in the month would probably form a parliamentary committee in order to accommodate the Swarajists. The committee would supervise the selection of candidates, oversee the distribution of campaign funds, and otherwise direct the legislative activity of the Congress. Prasad said that, like Gandhi, he had no faith in the legislative program but couldn't justify embroiling the Congress in a battle over what he felt was an unimportant issue.⁷⁸

At this early stage, each of the major factions of the Congress was careful to avoid the issue of office acceptance and was seemingly willing to allow Congress participation in the elections. All parties could benefit from the elections. Political organizers, whether they expected or even wanted to take part in later legislative processes,

⁷⁴Gandhi to Ansari, 4 Apr 1934, IAR, 1934, vol.1, p.262.

⁷⁵Ansari's press statement, 27 Apr 1934, ibid., pp.269-70.

⁷⁶Ibid., p.278.

⁷⁷Bombay Chronicle, 9 May 1934.

⁷⁸Ibid.

could use the election campaigns to reach a very large number of potential supporters. The fact that those supporters might not vote or might not even be enfranchised had little effect on this aspect of the question. There were things to be gained from an election besides elective offices.⁷⁹

On 19 May 1934 the A.I.C.C. met in Patna for the first time after its long hiatus during the period of civil disobedience. The committee inaugurated the Congress Parliamentary Board which was to consist of twenty-five members who were to be responsible for directing all facets of Congress legislative and electoral activity.⁸⁰ The A.I.C.C. also formally approved of Gandhi's having called off civil disobedience in April and gave Gandhi permission to carry out individual C.D. as he saw fit. At the same time the committee made the Swarajya Party a part of the Congress, ending its semi-autonomous existence and making its members subject to Congress discipline.⁸¹

Within a few weeks of its formation the C.P.B. (Congress Parliamentary Board) published a pledge to be signed by all Congress candidates: Anyone wishing to be considered as a Congress candidate had to be a member of the Congress, had to declare himself for a specific constituency, and had to agree not to stand under any other banner if he were not selected by the board. Before being selected, the candidate had to agree to campaign according to C.P.B. instructions and had to swear that, after election, he would follow authorized Congress directives. The pledge specifically included a prior agreement to resign office on the demand of the C.P.B. or other authorized Congress body.⁸² On 30 July the Working Committee passed a resolution stating that Congressmen who defied the C.P.B. directives or who otherwise acted "against the Congress programme and policies" were liable to disciplinary action.⁸³

Among the first Congress leaders to run afoul of the C.P.B. were militant Hindus opposed to the Congress stand on the communal award. In

⁷⁹See D.D. Taylor, "Indian Politics and the Elections of 1937," unpublished PhD thesis, Univ. of London, 1972, pp.7-8.

⁸⁰IAR, 1934, vol.1, p.290.

⁸¹Bombay Chronicle, 20 May 1934.

⁸²Ibid., 18 Jun 1934.

⁸³IAR, 1934, vol.2, p.201.

June 1934 M.S. Aney and M.M. Maliviya resigned from the C.P.B. because the Congress refused to take a firm stand against the award. Aney also resigned his position on the Working Committee.⁸⁴ Aney and Maliviya then allied themselves with N.C. Kelkar and the Democratic Swarajya Party. The Gandhiites made a number of attempts to reconcile the two leaders and their followers, offering them some participation in the selection of Congress candidates.⁸⁵ In early August Gandhi told B.C. Roy, a leader of the Hindu minority in Bengal with a great interest in the award, that Maliviya wanted to select Congress candidates for twenty-two seats in the coming election to the Central Legislative Assembly. Gandhi said he would not give Maliviya more than two or three seats and the Working Committee would not stand by while its policies were being publicly criticised by Congress leaders.⁸⁶ On 8 August Maliviya and Aney announced the formation of the Nationalist Party which, they said, would campaign across the country against the award and would, where necessary, put forth candidates in opposition to Congress candidates.⁸⁷

Gandhi, in a last-minute attempt to achieve a compromise, offered to allow candidates who were opposed to the award but not otherwise unacceptable to the C.P.B. to stand under the Congress banner.⁸⁸ In a public statement Gandhi said: "Nobody approves of the Award--much less has anybody acquiesced in it. Everybody condemns it. But a Congressman, because he is a Congressman, can neither accept it nor reject it because if he did one or the other he would be taking sides and therefore not represent the whole nation."⁸⁹ In the end, the closest the Gandhiites and communalists could come to a compromise was to agree that "where-soever between rival candidates it is manifest that one candidate has an overwhelming chance against the other the latter should be withdrawn."⁹⁰

The Gandhiite strategy of neutrality on the communal award may have been a factor in the separation of the Congress socialists and their

⁸⁴FR, Bombay, 2nd half of Jun 1934.

⁸⁵Ibid., 1st half of Jun 1934.

⁸⁶Gandhi to Roy, 3 Aug 1934, CWMG, vol.58, p.281.

⁸⁷IAR, 1934, vol.2, p.29.

⁸⁸Gandhi to Kelkar, 17 Aug 1934, CWMG, vol.58, p.317.

⁸⁹Press statement of 19 Aug 1934, ibid., p.324.

⁹⁰Gandhi-Aney statement, 20 Sep 1934, ibid., vol.59, pp.38-39. See also Gandhi to Maliviya, 3 Sep 1934, Aney Papers, part II, file 6.

conservative Maharashtrian allies. Kelkar had lent the support of his newspaper, the Mahratta, to leftists and radicals, a number of whom had supported his call for a total withdrawal of C.D.⁹¹ Although Kelkar and his followers tried to keep their feet in both the conservative and the socialist camps, attempting to maintain an anti-Gandhiite coalition,⁹² many of the Congress socialists were unwilling to work with Maliviya and Aney who they felt were blatant reactionaries. When in mid-June Aney and Kelkar agreed to work together against the award, Congress socialists denounced their agreement as a reversion to the sad days of liberalism in the Congress.⁹³

As it happened, Aney and Kelkar could not work together for very long. On 23 September representatives of the Democratic Swarajya Party assembled in Bombay and announced the dissolution of the Aney-Kelkar pact.⁹⁴ Kelkar adamantly opposed the award but had fallen out with Aney and Maliviya as to the strategy they should pursue in Maharashtra. Against Aney's advice, Kelkar refused to put up candidates from his party in districts which he felt were sure to be won by the Congress candidate. He himself refused to stand against a Congress candidate to the Central Legislative Assembly.⁹⁵

The Congress Socialist Party tried to treat the communal award as an emotive issue with no real substance, a smoke screen that obscured the more-serious issues facing the Congress. Communalism, they felt, would go away when the economic problems of the masses were dealt with effectively. On 3 October 1934 at C.S.P. meeting in Benares published the following resolution:⁹⁶

This meeting is of opinion that all the attempts to solve the communal problem have been wholly on a false basis of recognition of rights belonging to religious groups and this meeting

⁹¹ See, for instance, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya's letter in the Mahratta, 27 Aug 1933. For an analysis of the relationship between Gandhi and the Tilakites and of the alliance between Tilakites and leftists, see Indira Rothermund, "Gandhi and Maharashtra: Nationalism and the Provincial Response," in South Asia, no. 1, Aug 1971, pp.56-73.

⁹² For example the editorial in the Mahratta of 27 May 1934 blasts the Gandhiites for "smothering" the Swarajya Party and also attacks them for suppressing the C.S.P.

⁹³ Bombay Chronicle, 16 Jun 1934.

⁹⁴ FR, Bombay, 2nd half of Sep 1934.

⁹⁵ Kelkar to Aney, 27 Sep 1934, Aney Papers, part II, file 6.

⁹⁶ Congress Socialist, 6 Oct 1934.

is of opinion that the problem can effectively be liquidated only by clarifying the struggle for economic emancipation of the masses.

The C.S.P.'s first annual general session in Bombay (October 1934) adopted the communal resolution of the Benares party, after making a few changes in the wording.⁹⁷ There was little debate on this resolution, but a resolution calling on the C.S.P. to refuse to participate in the elections to the Central Legislative Assembly almost split the party. The C.S.P. representatives from Ajmer, Andhra, and the U.P. were opposed to the resolution. Those from Bombay, Mahakoshal (C.P. Hindi), Delhi, Kerala, Maharashtra, and Utkal (Orissa) were in favor of it. Delegates from Bihar, Bengal, and Berar were split on the issue. The resolution was passed and twenty of the U.P. delegates resigned from the party.⁹⁸

In fact, the C.S.P. resolution against participation in the elections to the Central Legislative Assembly was not very meaningful. Congress socialists tried to participate in the election but had little success. C.S.P. members had not been asked to serve on the Congress Parliamentary Board (the sole exception was Sri Prakasa who subsequently quit the C.S.P. to support Congress candidates in the U.P.). Congress socialists were not often asked to stand for election on the Congress ticket. Rajendra Prasad said that potential Congress candidates were asked to demonstrate, in order of importance; 1) submission to Congress discipline, 2) a chance to get elected, and 3) the ability to defray the cost of their election campaign.⁹⁹ Though some socialists might have satisfied the Gandhites on the first criterion, few would have appealed to the limited electorate defined by the 1919 Act, and fewer still would have attracted funds from the wealthy industrialists who contributed to the Congress campaign chest.¹⁰⁰

In the November 1934 election to the Central Legislative Assembly (the last elections held under the Montford reforms), Congress candidates won an overwhelming majority of the unreserved or general constituency seats in all but the Hindu-minority provinces of Bengal and Punjab. Outside Bengal and Punjab the Nationalist Party won only two seats--one in Bombay and one in C.P.-Berar. The latter seat was won by M.S. Aney

⁹⁷Leader, 25 Oct 1934.

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹Prasad, Autobiography, pp.427-28.

¹⁰⁰Each Congress candidate had to put up Rs.5000 towards the cost of his campaign. B.C. Roy to M.A. Ansari, 14 Oct 1934, Ansari Papers, file 244.

who was not opposed by a Congress candidate. Two leftists, the Madras labor leader V.V. Giri and Sri Prakasa, were elected on the Congress ticket. The radical peasant leader Bhai Parmanand won as an independent candidate in Punjab (see Table 3-2 below).

TABLE 3-2: The results of the 1934 Election to the Central Legislative Assembly.¹⁰¹

| <u>Province</u> | <u>Party Affiliation</u> | | | | |
|-----------------|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| | <u>Congress</u> | <u>Nationalist</u> | <u>Independent</u> | <u>European</u> | <u>Other</u> |
| Madras | 11 | -- | 3 | 3 | 1 |
| Bombay | 5 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 4 |
| Bengal | 1 | 6* | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| U.P. | 9 | -- | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| Punjab | 1 | 3 | 4 | -- | 4 |
| Bihar & Orissa | 7 | -- | 3 | -- | 2 |
| C.P. & Berar | 4 | 1** | 1 | -- | -- |
| Assam | 2 | -- | 1 | 1 | -- |
| N.W.F.P. | 1 | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Burma | -- | -- | -- | 1 | 3 |
| Delhi | 1 | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Ajmer-Merwara | -- | -- | -- | -- | 1 |

*The Bengal Nationalist Party group was led by Sarat Bose.

**Seat won by M.S. Aney.

The communalists were never again able to mount a serious threat to Gandhiite control of the Congress outside of the Hindu-minority provinces. The 1934 election tended to show their political impotence except where the communal issue overshadowed all other issues. The restrictions of the 1919 Act (its limited franchise, reserved seats, and sharply-curtailed devolution of powers) were such that no matter how well any party did in the 1934 elections, it would not have gained a great deal of power. However, the elections indicated the interest taken in the various parties by the electorate. The Congress demonstrated its influence with the electorate in 1934 and showed itself to be the party of promise for the future. There were on the horizon more important elections. Controlling the Congress in the contests that would follow the implementation of provincial autonomy, deciding Congress policies before and after those elections, was a very important goal to all groups in the Congress.

¹⁰¹White Paper on the 1934 elections, in L/P&J/7, file 4013 of 1934.

In his autobiography, written shortly after the events just described, Jawaharlal Nehru discussed the development of Congress policy towards British reforms. He described two groups or factions in the Congress, one constitutional, one vaguely socialistic. But the majority of Congressmen, he said, were not strongly attracted to either group: "They had no constructive ideas, and the one hope and sheet-anchor they possessed was Gandhiji. As of old, they turned to him and followed his lead, even though many of them did not wholly approve of what he said." Nehru went on to say that Gandhi's support of the constitutional faction turned the whole Congress to a policy of responsiveness.¹⁰² This picture of a wavering majority turned towards a moderate course by the firm lead of the Mahatma does not seem to be an accurate one. In fact, it is probably true to say that Gandhi's control of events, his power over the Congress, was lower in 1933-34 than it had been in many years. The Gandhites retained their position at the head of the Congress by steering it in the direction the majority of Congress members wanted it to go. By their shrewdness and tact they managed to take a number of dissident leftists with them.

¹⁰² Nehru, Autobiography, p.555.

CHAPTER IV

The Issue of Office Acceptance, 1935-37.

One of the most divisive questions facing the Congress in the period from 1935 to 1937 was whether and under what conditions Congress legislators would be allowed to form provincial governments under the Government of India Act of 1935. The Gandhites decided quite early that the Congress should not make a firm and public decision on the issue until the results of a legislative election were in, at which time a balanced assessment of the Congress position could be made. This policy was opposed by two groups in the Congress which took diametrically opposed positions on the issue.

The predominant feeling among Congress leftists was that the Congress should reject office firmly and at once in order to enter the election committed to making the 1935 Act unworkable and to bringing India closer to the Congress goal of a freely-elected constituent assembly. Most conservatives, on the other hand, said that the Congress could sweep the elections only if voters were told beforehand that Congress candidates intended to take office and to institute specific reforms. However, some conservatives rejected office acceptance just as some leftists favored it. Leftists who felt they could get elected tended to espouse a policy which they described as "capturing the legislatures." Conservatives who represented minor political blocks, who seemed at a disadvantage in the quest for votes, tended to be against office acceptance.

Gandhi made a number of attempts to appease first one then the other of these factions, not just on the question of office acceptance, but in a number of areas. Not the least dramatic of his gestures was to ask Jawaharlal Nehru, an avowed socialist and opponent of office acceptance, to assume the Congress presidency at Lucknow (April 1936). In September 1935 Nehru was in Europe at the bedside of his wife who was dying of tuberculosis. Gandhi wrote to him on the 4th, asking him to "take charge of the Congress ship." On the 6th Gandhi told Nehru (in a letter written by Mahadev Desai) that the Working Committee had unanimously agreed to accept Nehru's leadership. On the 12th Gandhi wrote again and asked Nehru to wire a reply. And on the 22nd he repeated the request, again assuring Nehru that he had the promised cooperation of

the Working Committee. But by this time Nehru's letter of acceptance was already on its way.¹

Gandhi seems to have had a more difficult time getting the Working Committee to accept Nehru than his letters to the latter suggested was the case. Their "unanimous" support was not easily come by. Vallabhbhai Patel wanted C. Rajagopalachari to be the next Congress president.² Rajaji was one of the first to accept Nehru's nomination,³ but five months later, as Nehru was about to take office, he still seemed doubtful. In February 1936 he told Rajendra Prasad: "I don't feel happy with dreamers and sentimental men in charge of the wheel, however much I may like them personally . . ." But he continued in a note of acquiescence: "We must face the practical difficulty of getting Jawaharlal to be reasonable."⁴

M.A. Ansari also wanted Rajaji to be president and said he felt that Jawaharlal had too many personal obligations in connection with his wife's illness to be coerced into accepting.⁵ According to M.R. Masani, Sarojini Naidu also spoke of Nehru's "burdens," one of which, she said, would be to contain the Congress Socialist Party. Mrs. Naidu was, said Masani, confident that the Lucknow Congress would definitely commit the Congress to a policy of office acceptance and was doubtful of Nehru's willingness to carry out such a policy. In relaying this information to Nehru, Masani said he was sure Nehru would resign if that happened.⁶

If the conservative members of the Working Committee regarded Nehru's candidacy as a drastic measure, the "constitutionalists" outside of the committee thought of it as a calamity. K.F. Nariman, then Congress Mayor of Bombay, told Lord Brabourne that he was dismayed at the thought of Nehru's presidency. He felt it would destroy any chance of the Congress taking office under the 1935 Act.⁷ The socialists, on the other hand, seemed to be delighted. Yusuf Meherally told Nehru it would be good to get things moving again. He noted with some amusement

¹Gandhi to Nehru, 4, 12 & 22 Sep 1935 and Mahadev Desai to Nehru, 6 & 29 Sep 1935, CWMG, vol. 61, pp. 385-477.

²Gandhi to Patel, 13 Sep 1935, ibid., p. 411 ³Ibid.

⁴Rajaji to Prasad, 7 Feb 1936, Prasad Papers, file VIII of 1936.

⁵Ansari to Prasad, 6 Oct 1935, ibid., file III of 1936.

⁶Masani to Nehru, 10 Jan 1936, J. Nehru Papers, part I, vol. 46.

⁷Brabourne to Zetland, 7 Feb 1936, Brabourne Papers, vol. 4.

an article in the Times of India which warned of the danger of a Communist take-over of the Congress.⁸

Gandhi had difficulty in persuading the Working Committee to accept Nehru and in keeping the two working together once Nehru was in office. One of the first things the Gandhites had to do was to circumvent a clause in Gandhi's 1934 constitution which required office holders to have been Congress members for six months prior to assuming office. Nehru had been out of circulation and had not renewed his membership in time.⁹ Afterwards there were disagreements about the composition of the Working Committee. The 1934 constitution allowed the president to name his own cabinet, but Nehru said, in his presidential address at Lucknow (April 1936), that he knew he did not represent the majority view of the Congress and had, therefore, selected only a few socialists.¹⁰

Nehru's differences with the Gandhites on the Working Committee developed into a minor crisis in May 1936 when, in answer to a complaint at the lack of women on the committee, Nehru told a women's rights group in Bombay that the committee was "formed under peculiar circumstances," and implied that he was not responsible for its composition. Explaining the incident to Gandhi, Nehru said that he did feel constrained and alienated and that a hayadar (self-respecting) president probably would have resigned:¹¹

Ultimately I felt that it mattered little to me who was in the Working Committee and who was not. The Committee as it took shape was not my child--I could hardly recognise it and to some inclusions, as you know, I reacted strongly. Yet ultimately I submitted but inevitably with the thought that I was surrendering to others and almost against my own better judgement.

⁸ Meherally to Nehru, 17 Feb 1936, J. Nehru Papers, part I, vol.104.

⁹ Prasad to Nehru, 19 Dec 1935, Prasad Papers, file VI of 1936. The Working Committee had the power to override the constitution in extraordinary circumstances (Art. XII (e)(i) of the 1934 constitution). Prasad proposed an amendment waiving the 6-month rule and the spinning requirement for office holders for those who could not comply because of imprisonment, externment, or enforced absence from India. The amendment was passed by circulation of the Working Committee members. Prasad to Committee Members, 17 Dec 1935, J. Nehru Papers, part I, vol.85.

¹⁰ IAR, 1936, vol.1, p.251. Nehru appointed four non-Gandhites to the 14-man committee--Subhas Bose and C.S.P. members Narendra Deva, J.P. Narayan, and Achyut Patwardhan.

¹¹ Nehru to Gandhi, 25 May 1936, Prasad Papers, file III of 1936.

Gandhi admitted that Nehru had been pretty much forced to take Bhulabhai Desai, but said Nehru himself had adamantly refused Sarojini Naidu whom the Gandhites had wanted on the committee. Gandhi said that Nehru could have omitted one of his socialist friends and have substituted a woman: "No other member would have had the desire or the courage to break the convention" of appointing at least one woman to the committee. He went on to say that Patel, Prasad, Rajaji, et al. were hurt by his wounded attitude.¹²

The Gandhites were disturbed by what they felt was Nehru's tacit support of Congress socialists and of other leftist groups that wanted to supplant the old guard. Nehru had also made a slighting reference to khadi in the speech he made in Bombay. And, though he later made a clarification,¹³ this too had its effect. Rajagopalachari told Prasad in early June: "It is not possible to feel happy over his [Nehru's] attitude and persistent activities that result in upstart opposition everywhere to tried old workers."¹⁴ Patel said he didn't mind Nehru's actions as much as his "attitude of injured innocence."¹⁵ On 29 June the Gandhites resigned from the Working Committee.¹⁶ The letter of resignation shows the intensity of their feelings:¹⁷

We are wholly unaware of the slightest pressure being put upon you by any of us. Anyway the position created by your declarations is highly unsatisfactory and we think we should give you the fullest latitude to work without feeling hampered in any way by the presence of colleagues in the Working Committee whom you regard as a drag. We feel on the other hand that the Congress should still follow the ideals, and the line of action and policy which it has been following since 1920 . . . We are of the opinion that, through your speeches and those of the other socialist colleagues and the acts of other socialists, who have been emboldened by the speeches we have referred to, the Congress organization has been weakened throughout the country without any compensating gain.

Gandhi managed to bring the conflicting sections of the Working Committee together fairly quickly, and persuaded Nehru to try to be more considerate of his colleagues' feelings. Thanking Gandhi for smoothing over the crisis, Nehru told him that he had not been aware of the emotion he had stirred up. He said (perhaps a little cryptically) that he was,

¹²Gandhi to Nehru, 29 May 1936, CWMG, vol.62, pp.454-55.

¹³Harijan, 6 Jun 1936.

¹⁴Rajaji to Prasad, 7 Jun 1936, Prasad Papers, file VIII of 1936.

¹⁵Patel to Prasad, 29 May 1936, CWMG, vol.62, p.476.

¹⁶Prasad, Patel, Rajaji, et al. to Nehru, 29 Jun 1936, Nehru, Bunch of Old Letters, pp.188-91.

¹⁷Undated draft of the above, Prasad Papers, file VI of 1936.

no doubt, hitched to the wrong chariot, and noted with some amusement the surprise on many faces that he had not been quietly axed by the old guard: "It seemed to be common knowledge there (as reported in the Times of India previously) that a peaceful end awaited me--politically of course. All had been fixed up except the cremation. Hence the surprise."¹⁸

Speaking for himself and the other Gandhiites on the Working Committee, Rajendra Prasad told Nehru that, after talking with the Mahatma, they were ready to forget what had happened and wanted to continue to work together without forsaking the old program. He said that he and his colleagues had noted Nehru's attendance at various meetings where the Gandhiites were denounced and where electioneering was carried out against them (he mentioned the annual Trades Union Conference of 1936). And Prasad said that Nehru had allowed his name to be associated with anti-Gandhiite remarks. This, and his failure to defend the Working Committee from its attackers, had led others (and perhaps the Gandhiites themselves), he said, to believe that Nehru really was against them. Prasad then told Nehru that the speech at the women's meeting had merely been one incident in a series of acts that, taken together, led to the resignation:¹⁹

There is a regular continuous campaign against us treating us as persons whose time is over, who represent and stand for ideas that are worn out and have no present value, who are only obstructing the progress of the country and who deserve to be cast out of the positions which they undeservedly hold. The very ideals, methods of work and tactics which we have learnt in company with Gandhiji forbid any scramble for power in any organization and we have felt that a great injustice is being done to us by others and we are not receiving the protection we are entitled to from you as our colleague and as our President.

Prasad concluded the letter by asking Nehru to help them get out a large vote for the Congress in the coming elections.

J.B. Kripalani also wrote to Nehru and explained some of the antipathy the Gandhiites felt for the socialists. He also defended their attempt to steer the Congress on a middle path between conservatives and socialists, office seekers and revolutionaries. Kripalani said that the Gandhiites had been prepared for new faces on the Working Committee, "not necessarily . . . the Socialists but . . . some persons who did not definitely belong to the Socialist Party but were in more or less agreement with you." He went on to say that the socialists were hostile

¹⁸ Nehru to Gandhi, 5 Jul 1936, Nehru, Bunch of Old Letters, pp.194-97.

¹⁹ Prasad to Nehru, 1 Jul 1936, Prasad Papers, file VI of 1936.

to many of the groups in India whose help the Congress desperately needed in the fight ahead--in the election, for instance. Kripalani ended by asking Nehru to have more faith in the Indian political genius and less faith in foreign (i.e., socialist) doctrines:²⁰

I believe in the genius of my people to evolve for themselves something even as Bapu did at the psychological moment. What that will be, I cannot say. But for the time being I distrust all those whose ideas, ideals, and methods of work are imported wholesale from outside, whatever their protestations might be.

The old guard continued to have differences with Nehru. Vallabhbhai Patel opposed his reelection as president for the next Congress session (Faizpur, December 1936). Gandhi discouraged Patel's candidacy, and Patel tried to get either Rajaji or Prasad to oppose Nehru.²¹ In withdrawing from the contest, Patel said he did not endorse all the views Jawaharlal held. He thought capitalism could be made to work in India. He, unlike Nehru, could visualize circumstances under which the Congress might want to accept office. And he assured his listeners that, in such a case, Nehru would go along with the majority of the Working Committee, no matter what he personally felt about the policy. Nehru was, said Patel, only the president, not the dictator, of the Congress:²²

He is the chairman of our well-built organization. The Congress does not part with its power by electing any individual, no matter who he is. I ask the delegates to plump for Jawaharlal as being the best person to represent the nation and guide in [the] right channel the different forces that are at work in the country.

Patel and the other members of the old guard realized that, though they differed with Nehru on many issues, he was their best hope of keeping the leftists in the country under their control. Their patience and Gandhi's perseverance paid rich dividends. Nehru's efforts in campaigning for Congress candidates across the country--he traveled some 50,000 miles visiting every Indian province between July 1936 and February 1937²³--preceded a sweeping Congress victory. And, under Nehru, the Congress socialists, though grudgingly perhaps, lent their support to Gandhi's program.

²⁰ Kripalani to Nehru, 11 Jul 1936, Nehru, Bunch of Old Letters, pp.199-202.

²¹ Patel to Prasad, 7 Nov 1936, and Rajaji to Prasad, 23 Nov 1936, Prasad Papers, files I & VIII of 1936.

²² Tendulkar, Mahatma, vol.4, p.132.

²³ Nehru to Stafford Cripps, 22 Feb 1937, cited in B.N. Pandey, Nehru, (London, 1976), p.197.

Jawaharlal Nehru was a man with political attractions few others in India (or anywhere else) could match. To the peasants he was a prince, a reincarnation of Rama, who had left his father's house to live among and serve the people. To the leftists he was that and a gifted intellectual with a sincere belief in socialism. He was the ideal leader of the Congress socialists but, to their continual frustration, he refused to lead them. And he had, from its inception, refused to join the Congress Socialist Party.

In October 1933, Nehru told his socialist colleagues that he would not support a new party in the Congress. He said he believed in separate institutions (such as labor unions) which served specific purposes, but he did not favor a multitude of political parties: "There is a great talk of the socialist party or the like but I am convinced that much of this talk is merely meant to cover ineffective action and also as a means of self aggrandisement."²⁴ A few weeks later, Nehru told the Bombay socialist leader Charles Mascarenas that a time might come when socialists in the Congress would have to go their separate way but that any premature move on their part would only "leave the organization which has so much influence over people's minds in India to other people with a reactionary outlook."²⁵

When Nehru became Congress president he defied Gandhiite advice and appointed a few socialists to various committees and sub-committees of the Congress,²⁶ but he did not hesitate to tell his socialist friends that he was not going to attempt to force socialism on the Congress. In May 1936 he told C.S.P. members that, contrary to their beliefs, the Congress could not then be converted to socialism and India could become independent without the nationalist movement adopting a socialist program.²⁷ In response to a complaint, made in October 1936, that he had not put a majority of socialists on his new Working Committee, Nehru told N.G. Ranga that it would do socialism a disservice to capture a committee at the top of the Congress since the socialists did not seem to be able to exert any influence over the members at the base of the organization. There were, he said, "a large number of middle but advanced elements in the Congress," who might be receptive to a progressive program. However, he complained, the Congress socialists seemed

²⁴ Nehru to Abdur Rahim, 30 Oct 1933, J. Nehru Papers, part I, vol.1.

²⁵ Nehru to Mascarenas, 10 Nov 1933, *ibid.*, vol.3.

²⁶ Gandhi to Nehru, 19 Jun and 15 Jul 1936, *CWMG*, vol.63, p.72.

²⁷ P.V. Gadgil to Nehru, 23 May 1936, J. Nehru Papers, part I, vol.21.

only to be able to irritate them.²⁸

Nehru also steadfastly refused to use his position as Congress president to favor socialists who were at odds with Congress leaders in the provinces. In April 1936 Nehru received a copy of a resolution from Swami Sahajanand, a peasant organizer from Bihar. Sahajanand wanted Nehru's help in getting the reluctant Bihar P.C.C. to mount a campaign in aid of peasant relief. Nehru said he agreed with Sahajanand's demands but that, as president of the whole Congress, he could not tell the P.C.C. how to conduct provincial business.²⁹ In December Nehru received a petition from Dinker Mehta, the secretary of the Gujarat C.S.P., who complained that Vallabhbhai Patel had so gerrymandered Gujarat Congress districts as to preclude the election of socialists to Congress committees. Jawaharlal refused to discuss the merits of the complaint, except to say that he did not see how the Congress constitution had been violated. He told Mehta not to make "hysterical" charges against prominent Congressmen.³⁰

In later years, after Nehru had repeatedly refused to heed their calls, the socialists still looked to him as their rightful leader. He was mistaken in his attempts to reconcile them with the Gandhiites, they thought, but he was still the man they needed. In April 1938 one C.S.P. member described the special place Nehru still occupied in their universe. Gandhi was a father who, though well-meaning, was trying to tie them to the mistaken beliefs of an earlier age. Nehru, a full twenty years older than the writer, was a respected brother too much loved to criticise. The writer recalled that, sixteen years earlier, when Nehru began to go bald, he prayed to lose his own hair so he could be like his hero. Yet, he said, though Nehru still stirred them with his talk of India's socialist future, his recent actions showed traces of political opportunism. Would he continue in his mistaken efforts to try to effect a compromise between Gandhism and socialism?³¹

Even the independent marxist M.N. Roy wanted to be seen as Jawaharlal's ally. Roy and his followers broke with the C.S.P. in the

²⁸ Nehru to Ranga, 31 Oct 1936, AICC file G5 (kwi) of 1936.

²⁹ Nehru to Sahajanand, 1 Apr 1936, Sahajanand Papers.

³⁰ Nehru to Mehta, 5 Dec 1936, AICC file P13 of 1936, quoted in M.R. Dove, "Prelude to Congress Rule . . .," unpublished PhD Thesis, Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1972.

³¹ Unsigned editorial (possibly by Ashok Mehta) Congress Socialist, 30 Apr 1938.

spring of 1937 after a smoldering dispute about the wisdom of accepting office (there were other factors), and Jawaharlal, at least in name, was soon drawn into the battle. Roy accused the C.S.P. of trying to label him as Nehru's enemy. It wasn't true, he said; he and Nehru might have minor differences, but they held the same political ideals and thought along similar lines.³² Nehru was so widely loved, had such broad-based support in the country, that it was a form of political suicide to attack him too vehemently. Encouraging his presidency against the wishes of the Working Committee was surely one of Gandhi's most astute decisions.

The major issue in the Congress during Nehru's terms as president in 1936 and 1937 was the question of office acceptance. And the Gandhiites' position on the issue was made clear to Nehru before he took office. Rajendra Prasad wrote to Nehru in December 1935, assuring him that the Working Committee could support him "unless a radical change comes to be made in the programme and methods of our work." He continued by saying that part of the program was the decision to leave office acceptance an open question to be decided when the time came and not before. Prasad told Nehru that the Gandhiites would never take office for the sake of prestige or position, but, if in future it looked as if accepting offices would advance their cause, they wanted to have the opportunity to do so.³³ In November 1936 the Gandhiites were disturbed by press reports and editorials interpreting Nehru's election as president of the Faizpur Congress as a definite rejection by the Congress of office acceptance. On behalf of the Working Committee, Prasad asked Nehru to make a clarifying statement to the effect that the vote was an endorsement of his presidency, not of any particular policy. The committee even prepared a draft statement for Nehru to follow.³⁴

Even those Congress factions most anxious to assume such offices as would be available under a future Government of India Act claimed that they desired office in order to use whatever power they gained to enhance the fight against the Raj. This applied to all Congress

³²Roy's editorial in Independent India, 4 Jul 1937.

³³Prasad to Nehru, 19 Dec 1935, Nehru, Bunch of Old Letters, pp.159-62.

³⁴Prasad to Nehru, 26 Nov 1936, Prasad Papers, file III of 1936.

responsivists regardless of their avowed ideological leanings. Thus, in December 1934 a writer describing himself as a Maratha socialist asked the C.S.P. to reconsider its decision to boycott future elections. He argued that by taking office the Congress could advance the cause of Indian independence in two ways: 1) the Congress could use the limited power gained under the Act to ameliorate the lot of the peasants, and 2) it could force the provincial Governors into the choice of letting the Congress rule effectively or of invoking their special powers and wrecking the Act.³⁵

This statement would not have been inconsistent with Swarajist policy. In December 1934 the Congress president, Rajendra Prasad, admitting the semi-permanence of the Congress parliamentary program, asked Dr. Ansari to make sure that Congress-Swarajya Party members in the assembly reflected in their actions, in their public statements, and in their life-styles the Congress traditions of discipline, self-sacrifice, and public service. Prasad asked that it be made clear that acceptance of a parliamentary role was not an abandoning of past Congress policy. It was not a rejection of civil disobedience, but a continuation of the struggle against the Raj by different methods.³⁶ In January 1935 the Congress Party members of the Central Legislative Assembly met and declared that all party members would be bound by decisions of the Congress executive, that no member would accept office as a gift of the government, and that no individual member would seek election to the presidency of the Central Legislative Assembly. The party as a whole would nominate members of the Assembly to executive offices as it saw fit.³⁷ The party rules were substantially the same as those adopted by the old Swarajya Party under Motilal Nehru.

In August 1935 the executive committee of the C.S.P. could agree among themselves that the party rejected the proposed Government of India Act. But this was not the same thing as rejecting office. In fact, British observers believed that substantial segments of the party (particularly in the U.P.) were unreconciled to a definite rejection of office.³⁸ Just as some socialists were in favor of a qualified acceptance of office, some non-socialists were against it. In fact, some of the most outspoken opponents of office acceptance were

³⁵ Mahratta, 16 Dec 1934.

³⁶ Prasad to Ansari, 26 Dec 1934, Prasad Papers, file III of 1936.

³⁷ Leader, 21 Jan 1935.

³⁸ FR, U.P., 1st half of Aug 1935.

not firmly-committed socialists but the leaders of marginal constituencies which seemed to have little chance of dominating an elected provincial legislative assembly. In September 1935 when the Working Committee decided to postpone consideration of Congress policy on office acceptance until the Lucknow Congress (April 1936), Sardul Singh Caveeshar resigned from the committee in protest.³⁹ Caveeshar complained to Rajendra Prasad that the Working Committee should have firmly rejected the possibility of its condoning the acceptance of office. He said that Congressmen in Madras and elsewhere were openly advocating office acceptance. In such circumstances, said Caveeshar, the committee's inaction encouraged speculation that the Congress was preparing a last-minute compromise with the Raj.⁴⁰

Another Congress leader who opposed office acceptance was the U.P. Muslim Rafi Ahmad Kidwai. In October 1935 Kidwai helped engineer a purge of U.P. socialists from the Congress P.C.C., socialists who were, at the time, among the advocates of office acceptance.⁴¹ In January 1936 over 60 Congressmen from the Delhi area met at Caveeshar's home in New Delhi and published a manifesto urging Congress leaders to refuse to form or support any ministry in the future. This, they said, would be the most effective means of wrecking the Act.⁴² Caveeshar, a Sikh from New Delhi with a power base in Punjab, was not in a good position to lead a Congress party faction to power in one of the Governor's provinces. A similar state of affairs faced Kidwai as a member of the Muslim minority in U.P. Neither could confidently look forward to power under the scheme of provincial autonomy, and neither supported office acceptance in the early stages of the debate.

In the first three months of 1936, as the Lucknow Congress session approached, other Congress minorities began to express some fear that pressure to decide in favor of office acceptance might become overwhelming. Congressmen who represented non-Brahmin elements in Madras began to show restiveness at the leadership of S. Satyamurthi, a Brahmin and a staunch advocate of office acceptance. Non-Brahmin and Tamil-speaking elements in the Congress were evidently afraid of a resurgence of Brahminism if the Lucknow Congress came out in favor of office acceptance and if the Congress Party then came to power in Madras.⁴³ Andhra nationalists also expressed some trepidation at the prospect of office acceptance.

³⁹Tribune, 13 Sep 1935.

⁴⁰Ibid., 27 Sep 1935.

⁴¹FR, U.P., 2nd half of Oct 1935.

⁴²Leader, 17 Jan 1936.

⁴³FR, Madras, 2nd half of Feb 1936.

The Andhra leader Pattabhi Sitaramayya strongly opposed office acceptance as a worthless exercise. Under the Government of India Act, said Sitaramayya, the Governor of a province would always have the last word, no matter what a Congress ministry tried to achieve.⁴⁴ While this was certainly a factor in the office acceptance issue as it appeared to the Congress, it is probably not unfair to suggest that Pattabhi was also influenced by the possibility that Andhra interests might not well be served by a Madras Congress government dominated by Tamil Nadu ministers.

On 18 January 1936 a C.S.P. executive committee meeting demanded that the Congress state in advance its determination to make the working of the 1935 Act impossible.⁴⁵ This was not precisely the same thing as demanding the prior rejection of office; perhaps the C.S.P. leaders were still concerned at the split in their party over the issue. All could agree on a shared determination to defeat the intent of the British authors of the 1935 Act, even if all factions of the party could not agree that the best way to achieve this was to refuse to accept office. Against those who argued for an immediate decision on the issue at Lucknow, there were others who agreed with the Gandhite policy of delaying the decision until some future date. This latter group said that rushing a decision on the issue would only drive the Congress into a premature decision in favor of office; delaying a decision would, they said, allow Jawaharlal time to consolidate the groups who were against office.⁴⁶

Sampurnanand, a U.P. socialist leader, supported this policy in an article in the Congress Socialist. Describing a meeting of the Congress Parliamentary Board on 8 and 9 February 1936, Sampurnanand said that each provincial Congress leader came forward and said that, although he personally was against office acceptance, there was an overwhelming pressure in favor of it among his supporters. The C.P.B. recommended that the issue be left for the consideration of the entire Congress at Lucknow; Sampurnanand predicted that the Lucknow Congress would also put off making a decision on the issue.⁴⁷

J.B. Kripalani also attended the February C.P.B. meeting, and he too was struck by the "obsession" of the members for accepting office. He said all claimed that their reason for wanting office was the duty they felt to the people to deny office to anti-Congress and reactionary

⁴⁴Congress Socialist, 21 Mar 1936.

⁴⁵Leader, 21 Jan 1936.

⁴⁶Ibid., 9 Apr 1936.

⁴⁷Congress Socialist, 7 Mar 1936.

elements. Kripalani said that the chairman, Bhulabhai Desai, tried to remain neutral as befitted a member of the Working Committee but could not hide his enthusiasm for office.⁴⁸ Prasad had earlier told Desai that, at the time, the Congress would not undertake to accept office in the future. Given the political situation then existing, the Working Committee could either reject office once and for all or make some statement to the effect that they would consider the question after the legislative elections were held.⁴⁹

There was little doubt that, of these two options, most of the Working Committee members preferred the latter. Rajagopalachari was willing to state frankly that, as far as his followers in Madras were concerned, office should be accepted. If that couldn't be assured them at the time, he at least wanted to be able to tell them that "no futile wrecking" would take place.⁵⁰ Vallabhbhai, while not so enthusiastic about accepting office, warned his fellow Working Committee members that Indian industrialists who were contributing large amounts of money to the Congress election campaign might feel disinclined to continue to do so if the Gandhiites made a premature decision to reject office.⁵¹ The old guard went to the Lucknow Congress convinced that a further delay in deciding whether or not to take office was imperative.

In his opening speech at Lucknow, on 12 April 1936, Nehru said he was convinced that office acceptance would be a mistake, that even its consideration was psychologically harmful to the revolutionary cause.⁵² Other speeches against office acceptance were made by Sampurnanand, R.A. Kidwai, and S.S. Caveeshar.⁵³ When Rajendra Prasad asked the Congress to pass the Gandhiite resolution delaying the decision to a future meeting of the A.I.C.C., he said that even if the A.I.C.C. decided to accept office they would not be making any concession to the British. If it came down to it, said Prasad, he trusted Congressmen to resist the Raj as valiantly in office as they did outside it.⁵⁴

⁴⁸Kripalani to Prasad, 15 Feb 1936, Prasad Papers, file III of 1936.

⁴⁹Prasad to Desai, 19 Dec 1935, ibid.

⁵⁰Rajaji to Prasad, 24 Feb 1936, ibid., file VIII of 1936.

⁵¹Patel to Prasad, 22 Nov 1935, cited in B.N. Pandey, Nehru, pp.184-85.

⁵²IAR, 1936, vol.1, p.274.

⁵³Leader, 12 Apr 1936.

⁵⁴IAR, 1936, vol.1, pp.281-84.

An amendment for the immediate rejection of office was defeated by a vote of 400 to 250, and the resolution was passed without a division.⁵⁵ The Gandhiites had tried to mollify the socialists with a clause rejecting the 1935 Act and demanding the convocation of a constituent assembly. Almost as if in an afterthought, they also added one dissolving the Congress Parliamentary Board and replacing it with a sub-committee of the Working Committee. As an election drew nearer, the old guard took steps to strengthen their ability to control the selection of candidates and (if it became necessary) to control Congress Party members in office.

On 29 April 1936, a few weeks after the Lucknow Congress, the Working Committee appointed seven of its members (Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad, A.K. Azad, C. Rajagopalachari, Bhulabhai Desai, Narendra Deva, and G.B. Pant) to the Parliamentary Sub-committee of the Working Committee. These men would constitute an executive of the P.S.C., and the presidents of the twenty-one Congress P.C.C.s (except for Burma) would become regular members. Dr. Khan Sahib (the brother of Abdul Ghaffar Khan) was appointed to represent the N.W.F.P. Congress which was still unable to carry out normal activities because of British repression.⁵⁶ As the U.P. Congress leader, G.B. Pant put it, although the Congress Parliamentary Board had theoretically been a semi-autonomous body, the new committee would have much more power because it would have the full weight of the Working Committee behind it.⁵⁷

In July, at the first full meeting of the P.S.C., Vallabhbhai Patel was made chairman and president of the committee and given the power to dispose of urgent business on his own authority. He was also authorized to dispense with meetings of the P.S.C. and to dispose of any committee business after obtaining the opinions of the members by circulation. The minutes of the meeting contain a decision (marked in the margin "not for publication") that wherever possible the P.S.C. would select candidates who were able to bear their own campaign expenses.⁵⁸ At a later meeting, in September, the executive committee of the P.S.C. gave Patel the power to make disbursements from the committee's funds without having to consult with the regular members.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ AICC, Report of the 49th I.N.C., p.90. ⁵⁶ IAR, 1936, vol.1, p.255.

⁵⁷ Pant to Prasad, 11 May 1936, Prasad Papers, file I of 1936.

⁵⁸ Minutes of a P.S.C. meeting of 2 Jul 1936, ibid.

⁵⁹ Minutes of a meeting of the executive committee of the P.S.C. on 26 & 27 Sep 1936, ibid.

Patel's extraordinary powers and the decision to make candidates pay for their own campaigns were to cause a considerable amount of discontent among the Congress socialists. The Gandhiites did, however, gain some praise from the C.S.P. for the election manifesto they published in August.

What seems to be an early draft of the Congress election manifesto prepared by the Working Committee stressed the Gandhiite position on office acceptance. The recent parliamentary activity of the Congress could best be described as a continuation of non-violent non-cooperation, according to the authors of the draft. This activity was not entered into:⁶⁰

with a view to tender cooperation to a system which the Congress has consistently sought to destroy. But it has been resorted to in order to prevent the operation of forces calculated to strengthen the system. Therefore, office acceptance can never be with the Congress a policy of acceptance at all cost or under all circumstances. But it is not inconceivable that in pursuit of its immediate objective of exposing in practice the hollowness of the claim by the authors of the so-called reforms to give autonomy to the Provinces it may become imperative for the Congress members to accept office under particular circumstances and in particular Provinces. In that event the Congress will not hesitate to endorse acceptance of office. What those circumstances can be it is not possible to foresee nor necessary at the present stage to know. The immediate thing for the electorate is to plump solidly for the Congress candidates.

It was evidently decided that, despite the qualifications, this was too much talk about office. The Congress election manifesto, as published in August 1936, made almost no mention of the possibility of accepting office. It listed the goals of the Congress--Indian independence, the amelioration of poverty, the ending of social and economic exploitation, etc. It restated the Karachi resolution and the Congress agrarian policy established at Lucknow. And it committed all candidates to end the slave constitution (the 1935 Act). It did not say whether the Congress would allow its candidates to form provincial governments. The election was seen as a good opportunity to place the Congress program before the Indian people. There was no mention of any other motive for taking part in it.⁶¹

On 25 August 1936, three days after the A.I.C.C. adopted the manifesto as recommended by the Working Committee, the executive

⁶⁰ Undated draft of a policy statement (probably early Aug 1935), ibid.

⁶¹ AICC, Congress Election Manifesto as Adopted at Bombay, 22 Aug 1936, (n.p., 1936).

committee of the Congress Socialist Party stated that its members were satisfied with the manifesto and would give their full support to Congress candidates in the upcoming election.⁶² As the Faizpur Congress session (December 1936) and the election approached, the office acceptance issue grew hotter. In October, on his election tour in Madras, the Congress president, Jawaharlal Nehru, reviewed the arguments against office. He told his vast audiences that office acceptance would be the start of cooperation with the Raj; once begun, the disease of cooperation would prove fatal to the independence movement.

Speaking from the same platforms, S. Satyamurthi disagreed. If the Congress accepted office, he said, it would be to wreck the constitution. Failing to take office under the proper circumstances would be to give positions of power to British sympathizers, would be playing into the hands of the Raj.⁶³ Those who opposed taking office likened it to fraternization with the enemy. Once begun, they asked, when would it stop? Those in favor of office acceptance said that, to the dedicated nationalist, it was merely another tool to be used against the Raj. The Indian people had trusted their representatives with power in the Congress; they could trust their representatives in provincial office, said the pro-office group.

A staunch advocate of office acceptance with strong Gandhite credentials, K.M. Munshi, argued that the Working Committee had control over many organizations and activities in the country. It could be counted on to exercise similar control over its designated candidates. Accepting office and "assuming control of the legislatures," said Munshi, would not blacken the Congress or cause it to fall from grace. Even if there were only a small chance of "offering organized resistance to the special powers of the Governor," asked Munshi, "why should it be thrown away?" Refusing office, he said, would be playing into the hands of the enemy.⁶⁴ But the socialists and other opponents of office acceptance were not necessarily convinced that they had much to gain from office. They could use the election, the campaign for office, as a means of reaching a mass audience. They might gain adherents in the country. But they had reason to believe that, when the election was over, their candidates would not be in control of the legislatures.

⁶²Bombay Chronicle, 25 Aug 1936.

⁶³Ibid., 8 Oct 1936.

⁶⁴K.M. Munshi, Office Acceptance: A Survey of the Problem (n.p., [1936]), pp. 14-15, in Prasad Papers, file I of 1936.

One of the socialists' fears seems to have been that participating in the provincial government might destroy the revolutionary spirit of their followers. The C.S.P. had consistently opposed the Gandhiite argument that socialism could only come to India after independence. They held that independence could only come when enough people had a direct stake in a new Indian state. In June 1936 Ashok Mehta wrote: "To make the freedom movement most effective it is desirable to bring in it the most extensive and uncompromising classes in the country--the masses."⁶⁵ It was the support of these "uncompromising classes" that the socialists feared they would lose if the provincial autonomy scheme of the Government of India Act of 1935 were implemented.

In May 1936 the secretary of the Andhra Kisan Sabha told Gandhiite J. Doulatram that the peasants were easily influenced by local events and might tend to lose sight of national goals if they were allowed a say in local affairs (even a restricted one) through the Act. He said that, just as the kisan sabhas were threatened by the Act, the entire Congress could dissolve into local squabbles if the Act were allowed to operate.⁶⁶ Another more-immediate complaint the socialists had against the Congress approach to British reform was that their choices for candidates were not being approved by the Parliamentary Sub-committee (P.S.C.).

In November 1936 Sir James Sifton, the Governor of Bihar, told the Viceroy that, although Rajendra Prasad had tried to get a number of kisan sabhaites and Congress socialists on the Congress ticket in Bihar, the Congress' financial supporters had been unwilling to go along.⁶⁷ Within a few weeks Swami Sahajanand resigned from the Bihar parliamentary committee and threatened to pull his kisans out of the Congress if they were not given the opportunity to select some of the Congress candidates for Bihar.⁶⁸ Congress candidates eventually won 91 of the 152 seats in the Bihar legislature,⁶⁹ but C.I.D. reports indicated that, of the 91 winners, only seven had been selected by either the socialists or by the kisans.⁷⁰ And Bihar, because of the activities of the kisan

⁶⁵Congress Socialist, 27 Jun 1936.

⁶⁶Sec. of the Andhra Kisan Sabha to Doulatram, 18 May 1936, Prasad Papers, file IX of 1936.

⁶⁷Sifton to Linlithgow, 3 Nov 1936, Linlithgow Papers, vol. 112.

⁶⁸Sifton to Linlithgow, 3 Dec 1936, ibid.

⁶⁹See Table 4-2 below.

⁷⁰SoS to Cabinet, 19 May 1937, L/P&J/7/4378.

sabha there, was a C.S.P. stronghold. The C.S.P. fared no better in the other Congress provinces.

In mid-November C.S.P. leaders attacked the entire Congress candidate-selection process; Vallabhbhai Patel's first published list of approved Congress candidates, which had just been released, included none that had been suggested by the C.S.P.⁷¹ At its annual meeting just before the Faizpur Congress (December 1936), the C.S.P. passed a resolution that was highly critical of the P.S.C. and of the various provincial parliamentary committees for "refusing to adopt the candidature of some socialists, radicals, and trade union and peasant workers and of adopting others not noted for active work of sacrifice."⁷²

All this is not to imply that the conservatives and communalists were happy with the Congress candidates. In the southern districts of Bombay Presidency (in Ratnagiri District in particular), which had been considered pro-Congress, the Congress policy of opposing the Khoti system of land tenure had angered the Khots who were vowing to vote against Congress candidates.⁷³ In Maharashtra the revived Democratic-Swarajya Party severed its connection with the Congress and vowed to run its own candidates because the Gandhiites still wouldn't denounce the communal award.⁷⁴ And in Bengal eighteen members of that province's parliamentary committee resigned in protest at the P.S.C.'s refusal to accept their suggestions for candidates.⁷⁵ Here too the Gandhiite refusal to denounce the award cost them support. Earlier in the year, in July and August, Jawaharlal Nehru had, according to C.I.D. observers, been coolly received on his election tour of Sind and Punjab and had raised little money because he refused to involve the Congress in communal politics.⁷⁶

The C.S.P., then, could hope to find allies in their attempt to block the Congress from accepting office, if they could get these dissatisfied elements to vote with them against office acceptance and if they could force the Gandhiites to allow the issue to be put to a yes or no vote. In late-November 1936 the socialists estimated that without

⁷¹GoI (Home) to SoS, 21 Nov 1936, L/P&J/7 file 166 of 1933.

⁷²Leader, 27 Dec 1936.

⁷³Brabourne to Linlithgow, 13 Nov 1936, Brabourne Papers, vol. 11.

⁷⁴GoI (Home) to SoS, 21 Nov 1936, L/P&J/7 file 166 of 1933.

⁷⁵Searchlight, 4 Dec 1936.

⁷⁶Notes on Nehru's election tour of Sind and Punjab, 18 Jul-10 Aug 1936, L/P&J/7/1031.

allies they would control two-fifths of the delegates at Faizpur, whereas, they felt, they had controlled only one-third of the delegates at the Lucknow Congress.⁷⁷ The C.S.P.'s annual conference opened at Faizpur on 23 December 1936, four days before the annual Congress session was due to begin. J.P. Narayan set the tone for the meeting with a speech denouncing Congress leaders, half of whom were wasting their energies on the upcoming election while the other half pursued "with unruffled serenity their lofty dream of reviving dead and dying industries of ancient lands."⁷⁸

This last phrase was a jab at the Gandhites who had, perhaps in an attempt to give office acceptance a low profile, emphasized Gandhi's village industries and constructive works schemes and played down the importance of the elections. At the ensuing C.S.P. conference, the socialists, in one omnibus resolution: 1) demanded mass action in favor of a constituent assembly, 2) condemned the Congress Parliamentary Committee, 3) demanded that the P.S.C. form joint committees with the C.S.P., kisan sabhas, and trades unions, and 4) demanded that the Congress totally reject provincial office under the 1935 Act.⁷⁹ The Gandhites tried to accommodate the socialists on a number of issues, but they steadfastly maintained their policy of postponing a decision on office acceptance.

In the Subjects Committee meeting of the Congress session at Faizpur on 25 December 1936, Rajendra Prasad moved and G.B. Pant seconded a resolution that: 1) totally rejected the Government of India Act of 1935, 2) committed the Congress to fight the Act both inside and outside the legislatures, 3) called for a constituent assembly, and 4) said that office acceptance would be decided by the A.I.C.C. "as soon after the elections as is practicable."⁸⁰ An amendment calling for the rejection of office lost by a vote of 87 to 45.⁸¹ In the open Congress session the resolution delaying a decision on office acceptance was passed without substantive alteration.⁸² The Gandhites did allow a few socialist resolutions, notably Sampurnand's call for a one-day

⁷⁷Bombay Chronicle, 23 Nov 1936.

⁷⁸Leader, 25 Dec 1936.

⁷⁹CID (Poona) Report on the Faizpur Congress, 4 Jan 1937, L/P&J/8/637.

⁸⁰IAR, 1936, vol. 2, p.205.

⁸¹Leader, 28 Dec 1936.

⁸²AICC, Congress Resolutions Relating to the Legislatures, 27 Dec 1936-17 Aug 1937 (Allahabad, 1937), pp.3-4.

hartal (general strike) on 1 April 1937, the day the 1935 Act was to be inaugurated. Prasad had asked the Subjects Committee to leave the matter for the Working Committee to consider at a later date but then relented and let the resolution pass.⁸³ The Gandhiites also supported other C.S.P. resolutions or allowed modified C.S.P. resolutions to be passed (see Table 4-1 below).

TABLE 4-1: A comparison of C.S.P. and Congress Resolutions, Faizpur, December 1936.⁸⁴

| <u>As Proposed by the C.S.P.</u> | <u>As Passed by the Congress</u> |
|---|---|
| 1) Greetings to comrade Nehru, congratulations on his election as president. | |
| 2) Greetings to the Bengal Nagpur Railway Workers. | |
| 3) Solidarity with and support for the workers in the B.N. Railway strike. | 12) Congress expressed sympathy for the workers, did not express support. |
| 4) Condemnation of police harassment of Communists. | |
| 5) Call for a national boycott of coronation of George VI. | 20) Congress forbade participation in coronation ceremonies. |
| 6) Condemnation of and vow not to participate in any imperialist war. | 7) Congress warned of the danger of a war. |
| 7) Call for a nationwide <u>hartal</u> on 1 Apr 1937. | 21) Congress also called for a <u>hartal</u> . |
| 8) Condemnation of all forms of government repression of the Indian masses and of their representatives. | 15) Congress supported J. Nehru's call for a Civil Liberties Union, and 9) demanded release of all political prisoners and detenus. |
| 9) Call for constituent assembly; joint C.S.P., Kisan, T.U.C. input into candidate selection and immediate rejection of office. | 16) Congress rejected the 1935 Act; called for constituent assembly; delayed decision on office acceptance until after election. |

The socialists were dismayed by a further addition to the Gandhiites' disciplinary powers--the Congress approved a Working Committee

⁸³Searchlight, 30 Dec 1936.

⁸⁴CID (Poona) Report of 4 Jan 1937, L/P&J/8/637. The CID agent speculated that C.S.P. strength was higher on the Subjects Committee than its membership justified because a number of conservative members failed to show up. The Gandhiites let a few resolutions from C.S.P. members pass the Subjects Committee and then rejected or modified them in the open session, according to the agent. He estimated that about 135 of the 286 Subjects Committee members attended.

resolution giving the committee the power to expel from ordinary membership any Congressman who "deliberately acts in a manner which . . . is likely to lower the power and prestige of the Congress . . ."

Commenting on this and other issues in an article in the Congress Socialist in January 1937, M.R. Masani attacked Vallabhbhai Patel for trying to have N.G. Ranga expelled. Ranga had circulated a petition among Congress members, asking them to help achieve the "peasants' demands" by suitably altering the decisions of the Congress Parliamentary Committee. According to Masani, Patel managed to force Ranga to withdraw the petition, but was unsuccessful in an attempt to have him expelled from the Congress.⁸⁵ On the whole, however, the socialists did their best to depict the Faizpur Congress as a C.S.P. victory.

Ashok Mehta and J.P. Narayan (in separate articles) described the Congress session as a turning point. Although it might look like a defeat, they said, the socialists had made substantial gains. They both emphasized that it was the first rural Congress, that the Congress had agreed to continue its "mass contacts program" initiated at Lucknow a year earlier, and that the Congress had begun to show an interest in the plight of workers and kisans.⁸⁶ M.R. Masani also put a rather glowing polish on the events at Faizpur. Masani, who had been rather half-hearted in his denunciation of office acceptance in the past, implied that the delay in deciding whether or not the Congress would "wreck the Constitution from within" (i.e., would form governments in the provinces) was an unimportant, tactical decision with little impact. What was important, said Masani, was that the leftists at Faizpur had begun to assert themselves--the atmosphere had changed:⁸⁷

What lies beyond, it is too early to speculate but one can say with confidence, that the period of political depression has come to an end, that our efforts as a "Ginger Group" in the Congress have succeeded and that we have times of growing struggle ahead of us.

In January the C.S.P. gave a blanket endorsement to all Congress candidates (even though some were not "the best that one could desire") because the Congress had vowed to "wreck the slave constitution."⁸⁸

The Congress successes in the 1937 legislative election probably surprised even its most ardent supporters. Congress candidates won an

⁸⁵Congress Socialist, 30 Dec 1936.

⁸⁶Ibid., 9 Jan 1937.

⁸⁷C.S.P. "Foreign Newsletter," 16 Jan 1937, in L/P&J/7, file 2517 of 1935.

⁸⁸Congress Socialist, 23 Jan 1937.

absolute majority of the seats in the provincial legislatures in Bihar, C.P., Madras, Orissa, and U.P. They were in a plurality (had the largest block of seats of any party) in Assam, Bengal, Bombay, and N.W.F.P. They were in a minority in Sind and Punjab. British observers estimated that, in addition to their five majority provinces, the Congress could certainly form a government in Bombay and might be able to command some sort of coalition in Assam and in N.W.F.P.⁸⁹ (see also Table 4-2 below).

TABLE 4-2: The Results of the 1937 Election to the Provincial Legislative Assemblies.⁹⁰

| <u>Province</u> | <u>Total Number of Seats</u> | <u>Seats Won by Congress</u> | <u>Percentage of Total Seats Won by Congress</u> |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| Assam | 108 | 35 | 32% |
| Bengal | 250 | 60 | 24% |
| Bihar | 152 | 91 | 60% |
| Bombay | 175 | 85 | 49% |
| C.P. | 112 | 70 | 63% |
| Madras | 215 | 159 | 74% |
| N.W.F.P. | 50 | 19 | 38% |
| Orissa | 60 | 36 | 60% |
| Punjab | 175 | 18 | 10% |
| Sind | 60 | 8 | 13% |
| U.P. | 228 | 134 | 59% |

Soon after the election the A.I.C.C. passed a resolution recommended by the Working Committee, clarifying Congress policy in regard to conduct of Congress members of the legislative assemblies. It opened with a change (perhaps a significant one) of the oft-stated intention to "wreck" the 1935 Act: "The Congress adheres to its general and basic policy of non-cooperation with the apparatus of British

⁸⁹GoI, Quarterly Survey . . . 31 Oct 1937, pp.33-36, Linlithgow Papers, vol.142.

⁹⁰Ibid. GoI figures do not precisely agree with figures in Congress reports because the latter reflect a few last-minute defections from the Congress in minority provinces and to the Congress in majority or plurality provinces.

Imperialism except in so far as circumstances may require a variation." And it continued with a set of rules which required Congress M.L.A.s to avoid ceremonial, official, and social functions "calculated to enhance the prestige of British Imperialism in India." No Congress Party member could accept a British title or have contact with British officials except through the Congress Party leader in the legislature. All were expected to wear kadhi and to attend the assemblies regularly. In addition it was decided that non-Congress Party members of the legislatures could join the Congress Party provided they were approved by the party leaders and were willing to take the Congress pledge.⁹¹ It was announced that the Working Committee would make a recommendation on office acceptance as soon as it had consulted the various P.C.C.s.⁹²

The Gandhiites, who had managed to delay a decision on office acceptance for two years, were now constrained to proceed very carefully. To jump into the legislatures and form governments too readily was to invite disaster on two fronts: 1) the socialists and other minority groups which had opposed office would not hesitate to depict the Gandhiites as latent traitors who had only been waiting for the chance to cooperate with the Raj and 2) the pro-office faction, long restive under the tight control of the P.S.C. and the Working Committee, might be tempted to assert their independence if they were not kept on a tight lead.

The four Congress P.C.C.s in Bombay Presidency (Bombay (city), Gujerat, Maharashtra, and Karnatak) met separately, in early March, to consider what recommendations they would make to the Working Committee on the issue of office acceptance. Maharashtra rejected office by two votes, after an acrimonious debate. The other three voted in favor of office with certain conditons.⁹³ Afterwards, the Congress M.L.A.s from the four provinces met and voted to accept office and selected K.F. Nariman as their nominee for chief minister. What disturbed the Gandhiites was that the M.L.A.s from Maharashtra defied the instructions of their P.C.C. and voted with the others.

In addition to that, Nariman, a Bombay (city) politician, represented a faction that had long resisted Gandhiite control. Bombay (city) politicians had for many years (particularly before the rise of

⁹¹AICC, Resolutions Relating to the Legislatures, pp.6-9.

⁹²IAR, 1937, vol.1, pp.175-76.

⁹³FR, Bombay, 1st half of Mar 1937.

M.K. Gandhi) exercised a disproportionate influence on the affairs of the presidency and of the Congress. Vallabhbhai Patel was quick to sense danger in this turn of events in Bombay Presidency. On 9 March he told Nehru that he was not happy with Nariman's selection and was particularly disturbed at the defection of the Maharashtrian M.L.A.s: "It appears that the M.P.C.C. is unable to control their elected members of the Assembly. Unless stronger control from the Centre is exercised, things will go wrong."⁹⁴

On the other side of the fence, the socialists were trying to lead a campaign against a too hasty acceptance of office. Narendra Deva, who had just been successful as a Congress candidate from U.P., warned that, though the temptation to "demonstrate the capacity of the people for self-government" was very great, the country's pressing problems would not be solved until the people had power.⁹⁵ He and other leftists on the U.P. P.C.C. managed to swing the vote against office in that committee.⁹⁶ Narendra Deva and the other socialist member of the Working Committee, Achyut Patwardhan, threatened to resign if the A.I.C.C. voted to accept office.⁹⁷ At the same time Congress conservatives, particularly those from Madras and Bombay, expressed their fervent hope that the Congress would not lose the opportunity to establish governments in the Congress-majority provinces.⁹⁸ At the A.I.C.C. meeting on 17 March 1937, Gandhi stepped in with what turned out to be another delaying tactic.

The Mahatma offered a compromise to the various factions of the A.I.C.C. He suggested that the committee authorize the acceptance of office in provinces where Congress commanded a majority of seats in the legislature, provided that "the ministership shall not be accepted unless the leader of the Congress Party in the legislature is satisfied and able to state publicly that the Governor will not use his special powers of interference or set aside the office of ministers in regard to their constitutional activities."⁹⁹ The socialists objected but

⁹⁴ Patel to Nehru, 9 Mar 1937, J. Nehru Papers, part I, vol.81.

⁹⁵ Pioneer, 26 Feb 1937.

⁹⁶ Leader, 9 Mar 1937.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 19 1937

⁹⁸ Ibid. The Congress treated Bombay as a majority province. They controlled a number of independent and Labour seats, which, added to their near-majority, gave them the power to form an all-Congress ministry.

⁹⁹ Tendulkar, Mahatma, vol.4, pp.175-6.

were overruled; the A.I.C.C. approved Gandhi's resolution by a vote of 127 to 70.¹⁰⁰ It is not clear what Gandhi thought the British reaction to this proposal would be, but there is some evidence that the office-acceptance wallas were confident it would be taken up by the governors.

Rajaji had approached the Governor of Madras, Lord Erskine, two weeks before the A.I.C.C. meeting, with a similar formula. He suggested that Congress would take office if a public and/or a written assurance were given by the governors that they would not use their special powers under the Act to override the ministers in the ordinary conduct of office, except on the instructions of the Secretary of State or Viceroy. The agreement need not be precise, suggested Rajaji, but he felt it was important that Linlithgow and Gandhi get together in order to find some way of saving face for the Congress leaders who were, after all, considering a complete reversal of the Congress policy of opposing the Act.¹⁰¹ The Gandhiites seemed to be prepared to have their offer accepted.

Two days before the A.I.C.C. meeting, the Working Committee appointed Prasad, Azad, and Patel "to be in close and constant touch with the work of the Congress Parties in all the legislatures in the provinces, to advise them in all their activities and to take necessary action in case of emergency."¹⁰² British intelligence analysts believed that the Gandhiites (with the possible exception of Gandhi himself) wanted to take office to pursue a program of "achievable" reforms--reductions of rents, taxes, and administrative costs. The old guard, reasoned the British, hoped this would give the Congress a much wider public following than it might otherwise achieve and would stand them in good stead if they wished to launch a non-cooperation movement in the future.¹⁰³

The Viceroy and his governors were anxious to have the Congress take office but were in no position to give assurances that would, in effect, abrogate part of the 1935 Act. Linlithgow was encouraged that the A.I.C.C. had not actually asked for public assurances from the governors--it had asked that the chief ministers say they were "satisfied"

¹⁰⁰Leader, 20 Mar 1937.

¹⁰¹Linlithgow to Governors (ex. Madras), 7 Mar 1937, Haig Papers, vol.14.

¹⁰²IAR, 1937, vol.1, p.179.

¹⁰³Report on Congress activities, 19 Mar 1937, Linlithgow Papers, vol. 157.

that the governors would not interfere in their constitutional activities. Linlithgow chose to look on this as a victory for the constitutionalists and asked his governors not to press the Congress leaders for a precise definition of their formula; although, he said that they could not allow the Congress Party Leaders to claim assurances that had not been given.¹⁰⁴

The Viceroy suggested to the Secretary of State that the governors convene the legislatures and, if the Congress refused to take office, form minority ministries which would be dissolved when the Congress did decide to take office. Zetland thought this was not a good idea. He suggested that the Government of India take advantage of a provision of the Act which allowed a six-month delay between election and the convening of the legislatures.¹⁰⁵ And this is, in fact, what the government did--it formed minority ministries without convening the legislatures, giving the Gandhites (and the Congress) until early August to decide whether or not they were going to take office.

Rajendra Prasad wanted to convene the P.S.C. to have it consider what the Congress response should be to the setting up of interim ministries in the Congress-majority provinces, but Vallabhbhai persuaded him that there was no need for any hurry. Patel said their best policy was to "wait and watch."¹⁰⁶ He wanted the government to be held responsible for any precipitate action that led to a break in negotiations. At the same time, C.S.P. leaders again objected to the A.I.C.C.'s conditional acceptance of office. However, they agreed to extend what they termed "critical cooperation" to the Congress leaders.¹⁰⁷ They too would "wait and watch."

One of the political factors which the Working Committee was able to take advantage of was the belief among some Congress leaders that a refusal to take office would eventually lead to new elections. It might seem paradoxical that a group which had just scored an astounding victory would want to start the battle over again, but even in late

¹⁰⁴Exchange of telegrams between Linlithgow and Haig, 18 Mar 1937, Haig Papers, vol. 14.

¹⁰⁵Zetland to Linlithgow, 22 Mar 1937, Linlithgow Papers, vol. 4. The Act gave a provincial government six months to prepare a budget. Until the assemblies were convened for the mandatory budget sessions, the opposition could not call for a vote of no confidence.

¹⁰⁶Patel to Prasad, 1 Apr 1937, Prasad Papers, file II of 1937.

¹⁰⁷Congress Socialist, 27 Mar 1937.

February, only a few days after the election, some Congressmen were suggesting that the A.I.C.C. refuse to take office in order to force new elections.¹⁰⁸ The Governor of the U.P., Sir Harry Haig, noted that, two months after the election, U.P. Congressmen were not particularly anxious to take office but seemed to be continuing their election campaign, evidently believing that any reforms put through by the minority ministry would be credited by the public to Congress agitation.¹⁰⁹

On 10 April the U.P. Provincial Congress Committee met and passed a resolution regarding the political deadlock. M.L.A.s should meet in defiance of the governor, they said, and demand that he convene the assembly. The P.C.C. then instructed its M.L.A.s to demand reelection on a program of reform, including: 1) peasant and agrarian relief, 2) progressive tax on agricultural incomes, 3) release of political prisoners, 4) reduction of rent and government revenue, and 5) reduction of government salaries.¹¹⁰

M.R. Masani commented on the demand for new elections, noting that both the leftist M.N. Roy and the rightist S. Satyamurthi suggested that the Congress M.L.A.s resign in order to force new elections. Masani said this would only force elections for the vacated seats and, instead, called for a campaign to convene the assemblies, which, he implied, was the only way to achieve new elections.¹¹¹ In early May the Governor of Bihar, Sir Maurice Hallett, told the Viceroy that provincial Congress leaders were continuing their public agitation with a view to a new election or civil disobedience, he wasn't sure which.¹¹² Two weeks later he said it must be an election, since the local Congress had begun to select candidates. If an election took place, said Hallett, the Congress would have so little opposition as to get a walk over.¹¹³

The Congress Party leader in the Central Provinces, N.B. Khare, likened the situation to the Cabinet crisis of 1834 in which Lord Melbourne successfully challenged William IV's decision to replace his ministry. Like Melbourne, said Khare, the Congress wanted the issue to

¹⁰⁸ Leader, 2 Mar 1937. See also C.S.P. circular letter no. 4, 31 Mar 1937, Narayan Papers, file 2.

¹⁰⁹ Haig to Linlithgow, 7 Apr 1937, L/P&J/5/264.

¹¹⁰ AP report on U.P. Congress meeting of 10 Apr 1937, Haig Papers, vol. 19.

¹¹¹ Congress Socialist, 10 Apr 1937.

¹¹² Hallett to Linlithgow, 3 May 1937, L/P&J/5/169.

¹¹³ Hallett to Linlithgow, 20 May 1937, ibid.

be decided by the electorate. If it went to a vote, he said, Congress would be returned stronger than ever.¹¹⁴ The Governor of the C.P., Sir Hyde Gowan, was willing to agree with this last assertion: "It becomes clearer every day that, however little the Congress would relish going to the polls again, its opponents would do so infinitely less, and the only result would be a complete rout of the non-Congress elements."¹¹⁵

The clamor for a new election was, perhaps unknowingly, abetted by the Liberal peer Lord Lothian. Lothian, a former Under Secretary of State for India, had many friends in the independence movement (including Jawaharlal) whom he tried to convince of the wisdom of accepting office. In April 1937, Lothian told Nehru that responsible government would lead inexorably to:¹¹⁶

the transference of all power to the legislatures and to the electorate. It does so for the same reason that unless the ministry by the extravagance of its policy alienates the electorate; a Governor in practice finds it difficult if not impossible to use his special powers, for the reason that to do so produces a constitutional crisis which ends in another general election, in which case it is the exercise of power by an alien authority which leads to the defeat of his policy by the electorate.

In a letter to the London Times, Lothian repeated his assertion that, no matter what special powers existed, in practice a Governor would ultimately have to refer disputes with his ministers to the electorate.¹¹⁷ Within a few days, Lothian's letter to the Times was being carried by the Indian newspapers.¹¹⁸ Gandhi himself sent a cabled reply to the London Times: "Lord Lothian's suggestion to refer disputes to the electorate is sound if it can be proved workable and not prohibitively expensive."¹¹⁹ But T.B. Saprú said that the Mahatma's reaction to the letter was more enthusiastic than his telegram let on: "Jawaharlal and Gandhi have, however, taken advantage of your statement that the electorate is the final arbiter. Divorced from the context it may possibly bear the interpretation which they are putting on it, but I am sure that is not what you meant."¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ Press release of 17 Apr 1937, Prasad Papers, file 2C of 1938.

¹¹⁵ Gowan to Linlithgow, 6 May 1937, L/P&J/5/183.

¹¹⁶ Lothian to Nehru, 9 Apr 1937, Lothian Papers, vol.341.

¹¹⁷ Times (London), 13 Apr 1937.

¹¹⁸ G.D. Birla to Lothian, 15 Apr 1937, Lothian Papers, vol.334.

¹¹⁹ Times (London), 16 Apr 1937.

¹²⁰ Saprú to Lothian, 19 Apr 1937, Lothian Papers, vol.342.

In May Bombay Congress leaders, including Gandhi and Patel, were touring the presidency as if for an election campaign. The people were told to expect a new election in July or August.¹²¹ By mid-May Vallabhbhai Patel had 95 signatures of M.L.A.s on a petition calling for a vote of no-confidence in the minority ministry.¹²² This was well over the number he needed, but, of course, no vote would be taken until the assembly was convened. The Bombay Governor, Lord Brabourne, told the Viceroy that Congress leaders seemed to feel they could better their positions in the rural areas of the presidency if new elections were held.¹²³ It is possible that the Gandhiites encouraged the call for a new election as a means of propitiating the groups that opposed office acceptance. They had been anxious to participate in the original election and seemed eager to join in a new campaign. The groups that favored office acceptance went along under the assumption they would have even greater majorities if a new election took place.

Another factor that favored delay was the nature of the Congress. It was, in the spring of 1937, very much like a parliamentary party with fifty years experience in the opposition and with no experience in office. It is not surprising that it took its time seizing the opportunities it won in the election. Congress candidates had made extravagant promises that they could not make good under the 1935 Act. In the U.P., for instance, villagers were withholding rents in anticipation of great reductions when Congress took office.¹²⁴ Out of office, the Congress could encourage such defiance of government; in office, they would have to be more circumspect.

As the August deadline approached, however, more and more pressure in favor of office came to be focused on the Gandhiites. At the same time, the C.S.P.'s opposition to office acceptance was being undermined. In late April the secretary of the Maharashtra C.S.P. and 28 party members resigned in protest to the socialists' opposition to accepting office: "In as much as we prefer effective political action to propagandist zeal, we have resigned our membership of the Congress Socialist Party."¹²⁵ A month later 20 more Maharashtrians followed suit.¹²⁶ And

¹²¹Brabourne to Linlithgow, 17 & 21 May 1937, Brabourne Papers, vol.11.

¹²²FR, Bombay, 2nd half of May 1937.

¹²³Brabourne to Linlithgow, 26 May 1937, Brabourne Papers, vol.10.

¹²⁴Haig to Linlithgow, 7 Jun 1937, L/P&J/5/264.

¹²⁵Independent India, 2 May 1937.

¹²⁶Ibid., 6 Jun 1937.

in June a growing split between the followers of M.N. Roy and the C.S.P. (based partly on differences about office acceptance) broke into the open after a long period of gestation. A number of Royists quit the C.S.P. and recriminations between Roy and M.R. Masani appeared in the press.¹²⁷ As Congress' left front showed signs of cracking, the right seemed to be gaining strength. In late May Jamnadas Mehta, a leader of the Bombay minority ministry, claimed to be conducting negotiations with certain discontented Congress M.L.A.s with the idea of forming a coalition government that could withstand a Congress challenge.¹²⁸ The shift of a few seats in the legislature would end Congress control in Bombay. It was not a prospect the Gandhiites looked forward to.

On June 7th Sir Harry Haig told the Viceroy that he sensed a change in Gandhi's attitude towards office acceptance. The U.P. governor speculated that Gandhi would probably have to give in to the "office acceptance mentality" of the majority of Congressmen if he ever hoped to have their support in a future mass movement.¹²⁹ On 16 June the Madras Mail carried an interview with Rajendra Prasad, in which Prasad said that the Congress leaders aimed to get a new constitution but did not think the present deadlock was helping. If the choice was between war and compromise, said Prasad, the Congress would try compromise first: "It is easily conceivable that offices may be accepted with this purpose and even the Constitution worked to this end."¹³⁰

Also in mid-June, Dr. K.N. Katju, a U.P. Congressman, told one of the minority ministers from that province that he expected the Congress to take office. In what turned out to be an extremely accurate prediction, Katju said that the Congress would pursue a moderate legislative program for one and one-half to two years, trying to achieve economic and social reform. When the limitations of the Act had been reached and the impetus of the Congress parliamentary program slowed, said Katju, the Congress would seek some issue (not an economic one but one that was clearly British vs. Indian) on which to base a demand for further constitutional changes. Then the Congress would go out into the political wilderness again.¹³¹

¹²⁷FR, Bombay, 2nd half of Jun 1937.

¹²⁸Brabourne to Linlithgow, 26 May 1937, Brabourne Papers, vol.10.

¹²⁹Haig to Linlithgow, 7 Jun 1937, Haig Papers, vol.17.

¹³⁰In L/P&J/8/637.

¹³¹Haig to Linlithgow, 23 Jun 1937, L/P&J/5/264.

On June 2nd the Viceroy made a public broadcast, encouraging the Congress to take office. The government could not bend the provisions of the Government of India Act, could not give the assurances the Congress had asked for, but, said Linlithgow, each of the governors would do their best to cooperate with Congress governments in a spirit of helpful good will.¹³² With this and similar statements in London by the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister, Linlithgow felt the government had gone as far as it could go towards a compromise with the Congress. On 24 June he told the Secretary of State that it was time to stand fast. Gandhi had been playing for time, attempting to satisfy both the left and the right wings of his party, trying to appeal to the revolutionaries and the parliamentarians, said Linlithgow.¹³³

But it seems to me that Congress will now have to face up to it and reach a decision as to whether the Left or the Right Wing is to dominate even at the cost of a split; and I do not feel very much doubt myself that there is a substantial element in the party who would see the disappearance of the Left Wing without any undue regret.

The Viceroy was undoubtedly cheered by the reports from Haig that in the U.P., heretofore the only Congress-majority province with a fairly solid anti-office faction, the general opinion in the Congress was shifting in favor of acceptance. The rank and file had been happy to continue the agitation of the election into the "safe period" before the August deadline, but, as that deadline approached, they were putting more and more pressure on their leaders to take office. Haig felt this would have its effect even on the "irreconcilable element" in which he included Jawaharlal Nehru.¹³⁴

The members of the Working Committee decided to meet in the first week of July to consider their response to the Viceroy's broadcast. Linlithgow's sources assured him that Nehru was the only influential member still adamantly opposed to acceptance, and, it was supposed, even he would not break with the others if they decided to accept.¹³⁵ Nehru had gone along with the majority when they decided against his proposals in the past, and there were indications that he would do so now.

¹³²Quarterly Survey, period ending 31 Oct 1937, pp.4-5, Linlithgow Papers, vol.142.

¹³³Linlithgow to Zetland, 24 Jun 1937, Zetland Papers, vol.14.

¹³⁴Haig to Linlithgow, 24 Jun 1937, Haig Papers, vol.18.

¹³⁵Linlithgow to Zetland, 2 Jul 1937, Linlithgow Papers, vol.16.

A few days before the Working Committee meeting, Nehru made a speech which, while not specifically mentioning office acceptance, emphasized the value of team work in the Congress. Certain leftist groups, he said, had consistently criticised Congress policy because they could not get the things they demanded--collective affiliation and better relations with the unions, for example. If they wanted these things, said Nehru, they would have to work within the Congress, go along with its programs, and gradually try to change them.¹³⁶ Perhaps this speech was an indication that Nehru had already begun to change his mind about office acceptance before the Working Committee meeting of July 7. He might have felt it was unwise to accept office but not worth splitting the Congress to prevent it.

On 7 July 1937 the Working Committee announced that Congress M.L.A.s could form provincial governments. Nehru and the two socialists on the Working Committee did not object to the decision; although, they might have insisted that the issue be deferred to a meeting of the A.I.C.C. as had been stipulated in the Faizpur resolution.¹³⁷ British observers attributed their silence to strong pressure from Gandhi.¹³⁸ Nehru himself, with a remark that, like the kings of old, the Working Committee could do no wrong, refused to discuss his motives. In a joint statement with Narendra Deva, Nehru said that the Viceroy's conciliatory broadcast coupled with a broad hint that continued delay would lead to emergency rule in Congress-majority provinces, led all of the Working Committee members to give provincial autonomy a try.¹³⁹ Time had become a major factor: budget sessions of the Madras and Bombay legislatures were scheduled for 14 and 19 July respectively.¹⁴⁰ And on 8 July the Working Committee justified its not going to the A.I.C.C. by saying that time did not allow it. Such a move would have "confused" the public mind "at a time when prompt and decisive action is necessary."¹⁴¹

The wording of the Working Committee resolution did not limit Congress governments to majority provinces only, as the previous conditional acceptance had done, instead, the resolution permitted Congress

¹³⁶Tribune, 1 Jul 1937.

¹³⁷See page 109 above.

¹³⁸Laithwaite to W.D. Croft (Private Secretary of SoS) 12 Jul 1937, Linlithgow Papers, vol.133.

¹³⁹J. Nehru, The Unity of India: Collected Writings, 1937-40 (London, 1941), p.58.

¹⁴⁰Linlithgow to Zetland, 3 Jul 1937, Linlithgow Papers, vol.16.

¹⁴¹Tribune, 8 Jul 1937.

M.L.A.s to form governments "where they may be invited thereto." British observers credited this change of policy to the expressed desires of the Bose faction in Bengal. They did not expect to win office, it was thought, but wanted to have as much bargaining power as possible in the Bengal assembly.¹⁴² Back in March Sarat Bose had said that he was not in favour of office acceptance but he did feel that, if it were agreed to, Congress should be able to accept office wherever it could form governments, including coalition governments.¹⁴³ After the Working Committee meeting of 7 July, Sarat Bose said that, by allowing the formation of coalition governments, the Working Committee had strengthened the influence of the Congress in minority provinces. He said this move had allowed the Bengal Congress M.L.A.s to work for the release of political prisoners, and gave them credit for forcing a recent move (on 8 July) by the Bengal coalition government asking the Home member to release political prisoners.¹⁴⁴

When he was asked if Congress would join in the formation of coalition governments in minority provinces, Rajendra Prasad said that there could be no coalition ministries but that Congress would accept support of non-Congress allies to establish all-Congress governments in provinces where it did not have an absolute overall majority.¹⁴⁵ This was said directly after the July 7th meeting and was an obvious reference to Bombay. When, nine months later, the Congress was considering a coalition ministry in Assam, the official Working Committee position on the issue had changed somewhat. Jairamdas Daulatram told press representatives in April 1938 that the Congress might form coalition ministries where "a majority of members in such a coalition party are subject to Congress discipline." He explained that there were a number of non-Congress M.L.A.s in the minority provinces who "always vote with the Congress [and, therefore,] are accepting Congress discipline."¹⁴⁶

Gandhi, writing in Harijan on 17 July 1937, said that he had advised the committee to accept office because he sensed a change of heart on the part of the British. The Act was still "wholly unsatisfactory," he said, but the creation of provincial governments representing 30 million voters was a beginning in the struggle to replace the rule of the sword with the rule of the majority. He said that he knew the

¹⁴² Laithwiate to Croft, 12 Jul 1937, Linlithgow Papers, vol.133.

¹⁴³ Anderson to Linlithgow, 9 Mar 1937, Linlithgow Papers, vol.112.

¹⁴⁴ Hindu, 10 Jul 1937.

¹⁴⁵ Statesman, 15 Jul 1937.

¹⁴⁶ Hindu, 21 Apr 1938.

British had not surrendered: "Underlying it is the hope that what has been imposed upon us we shall get to like, i.e., we shall really regard our exploitation as a blessing in the end." But, said Gandhi, he was confident that the people would not be so easily fooled.¹⁴⁷ At the last moment there was a bit of a hitch when Gandhi asked for the Viceroy's assurances that in the event of a major difference between the governor of a province and the Congress government, the governor would dismiss his ministers rather than override their decisions. Minority party leaders howled that this was tantamount to calling for new elections every time there was a crisis. Linlithgow agreed with the objection, and Gandhi let the matter drop.¹⁴⁸ Congress governments were soon functioning in Bombay, Bihar, C.P., Madras, Orissa, and U.P.

That the Congress finally accepted office was not, in Gandhi's view, a great victory. That it was still a united organization when it did so was an achievement of which the Mahatma could justly be proud. Congress leftists had tried and failed to force the Congress to reject office. They failed because of their own divisions and because they could not convince a sufficient number of Congress members that acceptance was synonymous with collaboration. The Gandhiites themselves had been divided on the question of whether or not the Congress should ultimately accept office. But all had realized the value of a consistent policy and had maintained that policy throughout the Congress debate on office acceptance.

¹⁴⁷Harijan, 17 Jul 1937.

¹⁴⁸Linlithgow to Zetland, 28 Jul 1937, Zetland Papers, vol.14.

CHAPTER V

Anti-Gandhiites and Congress Governments, 1937-38.

Congress socialists and other opponents of office acceptance had failed to block the formation of Congress ministries in July 1937. During the next eighteen months, anti-Gandhiites were limited by their inability to find an issue on which to base a wide-spread challenge to Working Committee authority. Gandhiite policies, as applied by the various provincial governments under Working Committee control, led to the disaffection of political factions in the Congress provinces. For instance: labor leaders in Bombay and in the U.P. objected to the efforts of Congress governments to limit strikes and impose mandatory arbitration and conciliation on industrial disputes; peasant leaders in Bihar and in the U.P. were often disappointed with the results of Working Committee mediation of conflicts between peasants and proprietors; and other communities--Tamil and Andhra nationalists in Madras, Marathi speakers in Bombay and the C.P., and militant Hindus throughout India--began to feel that their special interests were being neglected by the Gandhiites. These disaffected factions seemed to present Congress leftists with the opportunity to mount an India-wide challenge to Gandhiite control of the Congress. But, during the eighteen month period under discussion, Congress leftists were unable to form lasting alliances with the Gandhiites' enemies in the provinces.

As potential points of conflict arose, the old guard managed to drown incipient revolt in the larger issues of anti-imperialist politics. The Gandhiites justified locally-unpopular policies by attempting to demonstrate that these policies were in the interest of the independence movement as a whole. At times the Gandhiites seemed to manufacture confrontations with the Government of India for the sole purpose of containing some internal Congress dispute. When confrontations came and Congress leftists were faced with the choice of continuing to cooperate with the old guard or of storming off into revolutionary isolation, the revolution was always postponed, cooperation grudgingly extended. The Congress Socialist Party which might have benefitted from weaknesses in the Congress was itself paralyzed by internal dissension. One sign of this dissension was the defection of the "Royists" from the party.

The C.S.P.'s differences with M.N. Roy and his followers began some months before the Congress decided to accept office, and they continued to weaken the party for months afterwards. Roy was not himself a member of the C.S.P. but many loyal "Royists" were. Their response to Roy's attacks on the C.S.P. had a devastating effect on the fortunes of the party. In the A.I.C.C. election following the Faizpur Congress, the C.S.P. needed a quota of six votes in the single transferable vote system in order to elect their candidate in the Bombay P.C.C., M.R. Masani, to the A.I.C.C. Although there were seven C.S.P. members on the committee, Masani got only five votes. The socialists accused Roy of sabotaging their party and of manipulating the vote in order to insure a right-wing victory.¹

In April 1937 Roy's newspaper, Independent India, carried a critical letter from a socialist in Maharashtra. The writer said that the C.S.P. policy of demanding collective affiliation and of holding out against office acceptance might have been a correct socialist line, but it had the undesired effect of splitting the Congress and of isolating the socialists. There would be no socialism without independence, he said, and asked if the C.S.P. wanted to be the socialist vanguard of a free India or the revolutionary idealists of a slave India.² Roy himself actually prepared a resolution in favor of office acceptance for a June meeting of the U.P. Provincial Congress Committee.³

In June Masani accused Roy of engineering a coordinated series of resignations from the C.S.P. in Maharashtra, Bombay, and Sind in order to make it look as if the party were collapsing. Masani said that Roy had shown a particular desire to ingratiate himself with the Gandhiites (evidently referring to meetings between Roy and Patel) and had directed all his hostility towards the C.S.P. Masani felt that Roy was trying to make himself the only leader of the leftists in India by destroying his major competition, the Congress Socialist Party.⁴ After the Congress accepted office, the defections from the C.S.P. continued. In July, 16 Bengali C.S.P. members resigned because of what they called the party's "sectarian" attitude.⁵ In Bihar, Sahajanand broke with the C.S.P. by declaring his support of office acceptance.⁶ And in Punjab, three M.L.A.s, who had been expelled from the C.S.P. for standing for office, declared their hostility to the organization, accusing the

¹Congress Socialist, 6 Mar 1937.

²Independent India, 25 Apr 1937.

⁴Congress Socialist, 26 Jun 1937.

⁵Independent India, 11 Jul 1937.

³Leader, 19 Jun 1937.

⁶Ibid., 18 Jul 1937.

party leaders of being unrepresentative and ineffective.⁷

In a series of letters made public in November 1937, Roy spelled out his differences with the C.S.P. He claimed to have written to C.S.P. leaders in May 1934, in May 1935, and in February 1936, each time advising the dissolution of the party. Roy said that the Congress was firmly in the control of a right-wing dictatorship. By forming a socialist party inside the Congress, said Roy, the C.S.P. was clearly identifying its members and putting all of them in the hands of the enemies of socialism: "We do not want to be a group of outcasts magnanimously tolerated inside the Congress, dominated directly or indirectly by the Bourgeoise." Roy wanted to replace the C.S.P. with a revolutionary Marxist party that would work both inside and outside the Congress to bring about a "democratic revolution."⁸

The C.S.P. leaders implied that Roy had made up the letters after their break in the Spring of 1937. They said they had never received the letters as published, and had gotten only a "mutilated and altered" version of the one dated 3 February 1936.⁹ After a Gandhiite newspaper article discussed this schism on the left, J.P. Narayan defended what he described as an expulsion of the Royists from the C.S.P. Certainly, he said, the Gandhiites would not tolerate the presence of obstructionists and wreckers in their organization.¹⁰ Indeed, discipline was the forte of the old guard.

The Gandhiites emphasized internal discipline and a show of austerity as the Congress ministers were taking office. The Working Committee was determined that Congress governments would be subject to their authority and that Congress ministers would exemplify in their daily lives the contrast between the opulence of the Raj and the self-sacrificing Gandhian ideal of public service. The old guard maintained that the parliamentary activity they had reluctantly entered into was absolutely subordinate to the larger Congress goal of independence from the Raj. Congress ministers and M.L.A.s would be required to demonstrate their readiness to throw away the prizes won in the recent elections and to sacrifice their interests for the sake of Indian independence, if the time came to do so. The Gandhiites wanted to be the only ones to decide when and if such a sacrifice was necessary. Their involve-

⁷Tribune, 4 Aug 1937.

⁸M.N. Roy, Letters to the C.S.P. (Bombay, 1937), pp.20 & 11-12. See also J.P. Haithcox, Communism and Nationalism, p.246.

⁹Congress Socialist, 13 Nov 1937.

¹⁰Searchlight, 4 Jan 1938.

ment in the downfall of K.F. Nariman is illustrative of their determination.

Nariman, a powerful figure in Bombay city politics, had frequently clashed with the Gandhiites. In the autumn of 1933, he was a staunch opponent of any continuation of civil disobedience, but, unlike most of his neo-swarajist allies, he openly attacked Gandhi.¹¹ He also attempted to arrange a meeting of the A.I.C.C. to override Gandhi's decision to continue individual C.D.¹² In November 1934 Nariman failed to deliver a block of votes in the election to the Central Legislative Assembly which would have insured the victory of K.M. Munshi, the Congress (Swarajya Party) candidate. Munshi was defeated. Both the neo-swarajists and the Gandhiites said Nariman had bungled the affair, and the latter group made no secret of their suspicions that he had sold the votes to their opponents.¹³

In March 1937 Nariman made a bid to assume the leadership of the Congress Party in the Bombay Assembly. He was defeated by B.G. Kher and accused the Gandhiites of having engineered his defeat. Vallabhbhai Patel denied the accusation, but there is much circumstantial evidence that he did play a crucial part in Nariman's loss.¹⁴ In later statements, Nariman implied that he had been axed because he refused to obey Patel's instructions to favor Gujerat over the other three Congress provinces in the presidency.¹⁵ Nariman had been the subject of disciplinary action by the Working Committee,¹⁶ and in November 1938 he was denied selection as a Congress candidate in the Bombay municipal election.¹⁷ In the summer of 1939 he became a vice president of Subhas

¹¹Mahratta, 5 Nov 1933. Nariman asked Congress workers to help end Gandhi's "hypnotic" influence over the Congress.

¹²Nariman to J. Nehru, 18 Nov 1933, Home Pol. file 4/19 of 1933. An attached note says that Nariman and Nehru did not get along very well and that Nariman was trying to be especially polite to Nehru who was the secretary of the A.I.C.C.

¹³Mahadev Desai to Prasad, 28 Nov 1934, Prasad Papers, file VII of 1936, and Ansari to S.A. Brelvi, 3 Dec 1934, Brelvi Papers.

¹⁴See D.D. Taylor, "Crises of Authority and Leadership in the Indian National Congress, 1936-1939," in Leadership in South Asia, ed. by B.N. Pandey (New Delhi, 1977), pp. 328-29. See also Kher Papers, part I, file 12 and AICC file E7 of 1937.

¹⁵Hindu, 10 Jul 1937.

¹⁶On 22 Mar 1937, AICC file E7 of 1937.

¹⁷S.K. Patil to Nariman, 2 Nov 1938, Kher papers, part I, file 12.

Bose's Forward Bloc (ostensibly a leftist organization) and accused the Gandhiites of systematically eliminating leftists from the Congress.¹⁸ By that time he evidently considered himself a member of that persecuted minority.

K.M. Munshi might have seemed a more logical replacement for Nariman than Kher, the man chosen. But Kher, a relative newcomer, was less rich in enemies than was Munshi, and he was undeniably loyal to the old guard. Kher also had the advantage of being a Maharashtrian and thus a member of the majority community in the Congress Bombay presidency--he was actually a member of the Bombay city Congress, however. Munshi was a Gujarati and was too closely connected with Patel and the Gujarat Congress to be acceptable to the majority of the Congress members in the province. On the eve of the election for the party leadership, Kher told Morarji Desai that, although he had discussed the matter with Patel, he was not sure what he was being instructed to do. Was he supposed to accept the nomination, or was he supposed to decline in favor of Munshi? Morarji explained that Munshi could not be the party leader and that Patel, although he wanted Kher to take the position, did not want to seem to be picking him out for the job.¹⁹ Kher decided to accept the nomination.

The Governor of Bombay, Lord Brabourne, commented that he was sorry to see the change made--Nariman was a man of independent stature (i.e., he was a pragmatist) whom the British could deal with. Kher, according to Brabourne, was a Congress fanatic who would not do anything against the wishes of, or without consulting, the Working Committee.²⁰ The leaders of the other Congress ministries were described by the British as political conservatives, either loyal Gandhiites or political cyphers without the power to challenge the Working Committee.²¹ The Working Committee's directives would be followed.

The Gandhiites had, since 1920, maintained that British rule in India was a luxury the Indian nation could not afford. Even if it were

¹⁸ Press release of the Bombay PCC, 4 Aug 1939, AICC file P7 of 1939-40.

¹⁹ Morarji Desai to Gandhi, 21 Sep 1937, Kher Papers, part I, file 12. The letter is a typewritten copy and is unsigned, but I believe from internal evidence, that it was undoubtedly written by Desai.

²⁰ Brabourne to Zetland, 21 Jun 1937, Brabourne Papers, vol.4.

²¹ See the various FRs for July and August 1937, and Quarterly Survey . . 31 Oct 1937, Linlithgow Papers, vol.142.

a good government, which it was not, they said, it was ten times more expensive than a poor country could afford--the Indian Army and the machinery of the Raj were crushing the peasant. Whereas the style of the Raj was intended to overshadow the splendor of all past rulers of India, Congress governments would, by their austerity, provide a conspicuous contrast to their counterparts in the British administration. In early August 1937, Vallabhbhai Patel distributed a strict code of conduct to the members of Congress governments. As had been promised in the election, Patel ordered ministers to observe rigid limits in social contacts with governors and with the Government of India. Ministers would be reimbursed for necessary travel on the basis of third-class fares and all other allowances and salaries would be scaled accordingly.²² An article in Harijan defended the planned low salaries for Congress ministers (Rs. 500 per month) by comparing that figure with the nation's per capita income. The highest administrative salary in India, according to the article, was 650 times the Indian per capita income. The ratio in Great Britain was 32 to 1 and in the U.S.A. was 15 to 1.²³

The conspicuous austerity of Congress governments acted to assure the wealthy supporters of the Congress that the future government of a free India would not need to impose a radical redistribution of wealth on the nation. Unlike their socialist opponents, the Gandhites said they had no plans to spend vast amounts of money on reform. Thus, they would have no need to take that money from the wealthy. Instead, they stressed their plans for reform on the cheap. In July 1937 Gandhi told an audience in Poona that the Congress ministers would be able to do a great deal for the masses without raising large amounts of revenue from an already-overburdened tax base. Many programs, he said, would be based on volunteer labor and on self-help projects.²⁴

The C.S.P.'s public attitude towards the Congress was one of critical support. Editorials in the Congress Socialist during the months of July and August began with a request that the ministers act with "reckless courage" to destroy the Government of India Act. The socialists still opposed office acceptance, but they made no suggestion that

²² Patel's draft of instructions to Congress ministers, 30 Jul 1937, L/P&J/8/637.

²³ Harijan, 7 Aug 1937.

²⁴ Tribune, 24 Jul 1937.

Congress ministers resign. Instead, they demanded the passage of radical budgets that would squarely face the British with the choice of acquiescing in effective Congress rule or of exposing their true colors by instituting emergency rule. In August, when the rather-moderate Congress budgets began to appear, the socialists groaned in dismay but did not change their policy of critical support.²⁵

The C.S.P. publicly deplored Rajendra Prasad's statement that a radical revision of India's economy was not possible under the Government of India Act. The Congress, Prasad said, could do no more than introduce a few "ameliorative measures." To attempt more would, according to Prasad, merely split the nationalists and set back the Congress cause.²⁶ The C.S.P. rejected the sentiments, but could do nothing concrete in the way of opposing them. At a meeting in Patna, the C.S.P. leader Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya sounded a note not so very different from the one Prasad had been criticised for:²⁷

There are two types of government existing in India. One is the imperialistic British government and the other [the] government of the Congress ministers, the real representative government of the people. We must strengthen the Congress ministries and thus end British imperialism and attain the freedom of the country.

M.R. Masani began the month of July with a tour of the southern districts of Madras. He told workers in Trichinopoly that if they did not like the present Congress leadership, the only way of changing it was to join the Congress and vote in new leaders.²⁸ But, although Masani was critical of the Congress government of Madras, in private he told his colleagues to avoid a direct confrontation with the ministry and to concentrate on organizing labor and starting a vernacular newspaper.²⁹

In January 1937 S. Satyamurthi had relinquished the leadership of the Congress party in Madras to allow Rajaji to lead the party into the elections. When a Congress government was formed in Madras, Rajaji became chief minister. He was certainly the most powerful of the six provincial leaders of Congress governments; he was also the most independ-

²⁵Congress Socialist, 10, 17, 24 & 31 Jul and 21 Aug 1937.

²⁶Ibid., 4 Sep 1937.

²⁷Independent India, 29 Aug 1937.

²⁸Hindu, 13 Jul 1937.

²⁹FR, Madras, 2nd half of Jul 1937.

ent of Working Committee control. The Governor of Madras, Lord Erskine, described Rajaji as a sort of benign dictator, a one-man show. "It is entirely due to his personality and influence that the general position in Madras is so good."³⁰

One of the factors that contributed to what Lord Erskine considered a good state of affairs in Madras was Rajaji's disinclination to tolerate leftist opposition. The C.S.P. leader Yusuf Meherally had managed to anger the minority ministry in Madras enough to get them to put him in jail, and one of Rajaji's first acts as prime minister was to release Meherally. When he ordered the release, Rajaji asked Meherally to leave the presidency at once. Before leaving, the C.S.P. leader gave a speech in which he attacked both the British and the Gandhites. According to Lord Erskine, Rajaji almost had him re-arrested.³¹ Other Congress prime ministers did not have the same free hand to deal with opponents that Rajaji demonstrated.

In Bombay, B.G. Kher had tried to get Working Committee permission to keep in effect laws banning five Communist organizations in the presidency but was frustrated by Working Committee orders, delivered in mid-August 1937, to repeal "all such Acts as the Emergency Powers Act, the Criminal Law Amendment Act, etc. at the earliest possible moment."³² In fact, Kher managed to delay the removal of the ban on the Communists until 19 October 1937 and was able to keep and to use some of the emergency powers acts after that date.³³ But he was not as much his own man as Rajaji appeared to be.

Gandhi defended his ministers' attempts to suppress leftists in their provinces in an article in Harijan in October 1937. The Mahatma wished to disabuse certain people of the misunderstanding they had that, in Congress provinces, "individuals can say and do what they like. But so far as I know the Congress mind, it will not tolerate any

³⁰ Erskine to Linlithgow, 5 Aug 1937, L/P&J/5/197.

³¹ Erskine to Linlithgow, 5 Aug 1937, Erskine Papers, vol.10.

³² Brabourne to Linlithgow, 20 Aug 1937, Linlithgow Papers, vol.113.

³³ The debate was still going on in March of 1939. The most vocal proponent of lifting all bans on the Communists was Jawaharlal (Nehru to Kher, 17 Mar 1939, Nehru Papers, part I, vol.40). Patel told Kher that Nehru would probably let the matter drop if Kher could produce evidence of violent acts committed by the Communists. But he warned Kher not to base his arguments on CID reports, since the Congress had worked so hard in the past to discredit the CID. Patel to Kher, 10 Apr 1939, Kher Papers, part I, file 6.

such license." Gandhi distinguished between statutes which were inserted to protect the foreign rulers, which, he said, could be readily identified, and laws which had the approval of the public. Gandhi said the Congress ministers had a clear duty to take advantage of the latter statutes in order to protect their people from those who were violent or incited others to violence.³⁴

One of the problems that faced the Kher ministry in Bombay and, to their minds, necessitated the anti-Communist legislation, was the presence of a growing Communist influence in the labor movement which the ministers saw as a challenge to the Congress. Shortly after assuming office, the Congress government published a policy statement on industrial unrest. Bombay was the most industrialized of the Indian provinces, said the ministers, and Congress understood its mandate to insure the industrial worker in Bombay a standard of living and hours and conditions of work in accordance with enlightened public opinion, "as far as economic conditions in the country permit." The Congress government of Bombay would protect the right of workers to organize, but it would also do its best to maintain industrial peace: "It is the intention of Government to promote legislation aiming at the prevention of strikes and lockouts as far as possible." The ministers then went on to outline a procedure for mandatory conciliation and arbitration.³⁵ It was on this last point that the labor unions most ardently opposed the Bombay government.

In mid-November Lord Brabourne's successor as Governor of Bombay, Sir Roger Lumley, told the Viceroy of Congress attempts to control the labor movement in Bombay city. The home minister, K.M. Munshi, was trying to establish a Congress trade union in opposition to the Communist Girni Kamgar (Red Flag) Union and was, according to Lumley, planning to divert "secret service" funds to the new union and to a new newspaper. Lumley pointed out that by doing so, Munshi would avoid having to defend these expenditures until the next budget session of the legislature, which was scheduled in a year's time.³⁶

The Congress already had great influence among the mill workers in Ahmedabad, and in November the Congress-controlled Textile Labour Association was able to negotiate a wage settlement and avoid a strike

³⁴Harijan, 23 Oct 1937.

³⁵Note on the ministry's labor policy, 17 Aug 1937, Brabourne Papers, vol.25.

³⁶Lumley to Linlithgow, 15 Nov 1937, Linlithgow Papers, vol.113.

called by the Red Flag Union in that city.³⁷ They did so with the solid backing of the Bombay ministry. In January 1938 Vallabhbhai Patel defended the Bombay ministry's use of emergency powers under section 144 of the Penal Code to suppress Communist labor agitators in Ahmedabad. He also defended a similar action by the U.P. ministry in relation to strikes in Cawnpore. Patel said that organized labor had lost ground in these areas because it had fallen under the influence of a small, violent minority.³⁸

The forced settlement of the dispute in Ahmedabad amounted to a show of strength by the Bombay ministers who intended to introduce a trades disputes bill which would give their policy of mandatory conciliation and arbitration the force of law. In October 1937, at the time of the outbreak of the Ahmedabad disturbances, Kher discussed the situation with Gandhi and decided that the Bombay ministry would try to avoid a conflict with the Communist unions but would use their emergency powers if compelled to do so. If they were not then supported by the Working Committee, the ministry would resign.³⁹ Kher told Lumley of this decision and said he was confident that he would be allowed to take the necessary action.⁴⁰

Mahadev Desai, writing in Harijan in December 1937, defended the Bombay ministry's tough line and the proposed trades disputes bill. Desai said that the ministers should make "agreements arrived at by the representative organizations," binding on everyone in the industry: "This would prevent a few mills or sections of labour which are outside the influence of their representative organizations from disturbing the peace of industry by unauthorized conflicts."⁴¹

As an ardent supporter of the nascent Indian Civil Liberties Union and as the president of the Congress, Jawaharlal was embarrassed by the evident reluctance of the Bombay ministry to remove the ban on Communist organizations in the presidency. He was reported to have had an angry exchange with Kher on the matter only a few weeks after the ministry took office.⁴² However, when (in September 1937) strikes in

³⁷Lumley to Linlithgow, 1 Dec 1937, ibid. ³⁸Searchlight, 6 Jan 1938.

³⁹Notes on labor policy, Oct 1937, Kher Papers, part I, file 2. The notes are undated but seem to have been prepared for a meeting of the Working Committee which took place on 28 Oct 1937.

⁴⁰Linlithgow to Erskine, 16 Oct 1937, Erskine Papers, vol.10.

⁴¹Harijan, 11 Dec 1937.

⁴²Brabourne to Linlithgow, 20 Aug 1937, Brabourne Papers, vol.4a.

Cawnpore threatened the Congress ministry in the U.P., Nehru did not hesitate to defy Communist and C.S.P. leaders by taking action to protect the ministry. He wrote to striking workers, asking them to go back to work in order to maintain the prestige of the Congress government. And he supported the Pant ministry's efforts to control the strikers.⁴³

In an appeal to moderation and non-violence, Nehru told the union leaders that, although there were 50,000 industrial workers in Cawnpore, there were almost 50 million poor peasants in the province. Nehru said that no matter how strong a particular union was it could not hope to do a great deal until the general condition of the peasants was raised; otherwise, there would always be a thousand poor peasants ready to step into any position vacated by a striking worker. The Congress ministry would try to help, said Nehru, but was limited by the Government of India Act. What little it could do would have to be done for the benefit of all the people in the province.⁴⁴ By early March 1938 the strikes had been suppressed.⁴⁵

The Madras ministry also had some labor problems, but because of the relatively underdeveloped state of Madras industry, they were not as serious as the problems of Bombay or U.P. When the Congress took office, C.S.P. members in Madras attempted to form unions among barbers, boatmen, municipal scavengers, bus and truck drivers, and college students.⁴⁶ They were soon complaining that, despite their protests to Rajagopalachari, they were being harassed by C.I.D. agents and that their mail was being searched.⁴⁷ In October Rajaji ordered the arrest of a C.S.P. member, S.S. Batliwala, for sedition and for inciting workers at Venkatagiri to violence.⁴⁸ Batiwala was released on condition that he leave the province until his trial on 1 November 1937.⁴⁹

When he was subsequently sentenced to six months imprisonment, the socialists accused the Madras ministry of having forsaken the goals

⁴³ Quarterly Survey . . . 31 Oct 1937, p.21, Linlithgow Papers, vol.142.

⁴⁴ Leader, 27 Sep 1937.

⁴⁵ Patel to Prasad, 9 Mar 1938, Prasad Papers, file 1M of 1938.

⁴⁶ FR, Madras, 1st half of Sep 1937.

⁴⁷ S. Batiwala to Nehru, 19 Aug 1937, AICC file G5 (kw,ii) of 1937, and Gandhi to E.M.S. Namboodripad, 21 Sep 1937, CWMG, vol.65, pp.155-56. See also Namboodripad to Subhas Bose, n.d., Narayan Papers, file 29.

⁴⁸ Erskine to Linlithgow, 8 Oct 1937, Erskine Papers, vol.10.

⁴⁹ FR, Madras, 2nd half of Oct 1937.

of the Congress. They were particularly incensed that the prosecution had been under the sedition laws.⁵⁰ Thousands of Congressmen had been prosecuted under the same statutes during the civil disobedience movement, and many nationalists were sensitive to the implications of a situation in which Congress governments used the sedition laws to suppress their own opponents.

At the October 1937 meeting of the A.I.C.C. and at the Working Committee meeting which preceded it, Jawaharlal Nehru was reported to have criticised Rajaji severely for the arrest of Batliwala. Nehru wanted the Working Committee to insist on being consulted before any such prosecution could be made in the future. Gandhi defended Rajaji at the meeting and was said to have gotten so worked up that he collapsed from the exertion. Neither the Working Committee nor the A.I.C.C. supported Nehru's request.⁵¹ Their silence amounted to a vote of approval of Rajaji's action, and even Nehru admitted the necessity of controlling violent agitators.

Nehru told the A.I.C.C. members that all Congressmen were, because of their belief in swaraj, seditionists, but none of them could countenance violence. If the Congress governments could not persuade their opponents to forgo violence, they had the right to prosecute them, he said.⁵² In fact, the leftist strength in Madras was not a direct threat to Rajaji's government. British observers said that, as of the end of December 1937, C.S.P. influence in Tamil Nadu was negligible, that only eight of twenty-nine P.C.C. members in Andhra were C.S.P. members, and that, although the C.S.P. controlled the Kerala P.C.C. in coalition with Congress Muslims, only about one-third of the Kerala P.C.C. were in the C.S.P.⁵³ Congress leftists threatened Rajaji's government only later, when they were able to ally with Tamil nationalists and other minority factions.

The situation in the U.P. was radically different. A series of events, similar in some respects to the Batliwala case, almost caused

⁵⁰ Congress Socialist, 13 Nov 1937. Batliwala did not serve very much time in jail on the charges. After his conviction, he was let out on bail while his case was appealed. He lost the appeal after some months of litigation, and Rajaji remitted the rest of his sentence, because, he said, the socialists had behaved themselves in the interim. Erskine to Linlithgow, 20 Mar 1938, Erskine Papers, vol.10.

⁵¹ Erskine to Linlithgow, 16 Nov 1937, Erskine Papers, vol.10.

⁵² Quarterly Survey . . . 31 Jan 1938, p.28, Linlithgow Papers, vol.142.

⁵³ FR, Madras, 1st and 2nd half of Jan 1938.

the collapse of the U.P. and Bihar ministries. In what the British described as an attempt to propitiate the leftists and to draw attention from their inability to fulfill extravagant election promises, the Congress governments concentrated on the release of political prisoners from the time they took office.⁵⁴ It was an issue on which there were few internal differences of opinion; the Congress could readily unite to demand that the British release all remaining political prisoners.

The great majority of such prisoners were held in Bengal and, thus, were outside the jurisdiction of Congress governments. On 20 August 1937 the Governor of the U.P., Sir Harry Haig, told Pant that the Government of India would not object to the release of non-dangerous prisoners.⁵⁵ As the releases proceeded, the U.P. ministry began to be embarrassed by the speeches and actions of some of the men it had just let out of jail. Pant and his ministers were particularly distressed by the violent speeches of a Pandit Parmanand of Jhansi.

Parmanand was released by the U.P. ministry after having served 22 years of a life sentence for inciting units of the Indian Army to mutiny (Lahore Conspiracy Case of 1914). After his release, he began to tour the province making revolutionary speeches in which he derided the Congress ministries and appealed to the youth of India to take up arms against the government. The Pant government, under considerable pressure from Haig, repeatedly warned Parmanand to desist and finally agreed to prosecute Parmanand for a particularly violent speech he made on 15 November in Dehra Dun.⁵⁶ Pant refused Haig's offer to publicly take responsibility for the prosecution; he told the U.P. Governor that the ministry either had to accept the onus of its actions or resign. Pant told Haig that he had confidence in his supporters but that his political position was not invincible and would be weakened if he went ahead on Parmanand's prosecution. He said that prosecution under the sedition laws was hateful to Congressmen.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ See, for instance, Hallett to Linlithgow, 17 Jul 1937, L/P&J/5/169.

⁵⁵ Haig to Linlithgow, 23 Aug 1937, Haig Papers, vol. 17.

⁵⁶ Notes on a speech by Parmanand on 15 Nov 1937, in L/P&J/7, file 1717 of 1936.

⁵⁷ Note by Undersecretary of State, 15 Dec 1937, *ibid.* Pant was in trouble with Congress leftists who felt that the proposed U.P. tenancy reform bill did not go far enough to protect the peasants.

Parmanand was arrested, tried, and sentenced to six weeks in jail. Then he was immediately released on probation with another warning not to continue making violent speeches.⁵⁸ This did not satisfy Governor Haig, but he felt there was little he could do that would not precipitate a crisis. In late-December, in a telegram to the Viceroy and to the Secretary of State, Haig said that Pant was deeply involved in a struggle with the left wing of his party in the U.P. The leftists were agitating for a no-rent campaign and Pant was firmly resisting them, said Haig, but was in no position to anger his more-radical supporters by a stiff prosecution of Parmanand.⁵⁹

It would be a calamity if instead of this struggle between right and left, arising inevitably from their own policy and likely to have most far-reaching effects, we substitute a struggle between the Governor and the Congress on an issue which would be generally felt to be much smaller, and at a time when we should certainly be landed in a no-rent campaign.

Haig also seemed to be worried that the man he felt to be the real power in U.P. Congress politics, Jawaharlal Nehru, might stop supporting the Pant ministry if the Government of India continued to press for a further prosecution of the Parmanand case. Haig told Linlithgow that Nehru had already acted against a good number of his previously expressed attitudes by supporting Pant's use of emergency powers to suppress labor agitators and by strenuously opposing a no-rent campaign.⁶⁰ Jawaharlal would have a difficult time defending a Congress government over a prosecution under the sedition laws.

On 22 January 1938, Haig told Linlithgow of the results of the Congress election in the U.P. He said that the Pant ministry, with Nehru's help, had been able to get their candidates, Mohanlal Saxena and Vijayalakshmi Pandit, elected president and secretary of the P.C.C. but that there was a leftist majority on the executive committee. Nehru, said Haig, was under considerable pressure to dump Pant. Haig noted Pant's appointment of the former C.S.P. member Sampurnanand as education minister and said he felt this was done in order to mollify the leftists on the P.C.C.⁶¹

The Congress ministry in the U.P. was being pressured to produce some substantive measure of reform prior to the Haripura Congress session. Failing that, the Gandhiites wanted a general release of political

⁵⁸Haig to Viceroy and SoS, 23 Dec 1937, Haig Papers, vol.15.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Haig to Linlithgow, 24 Dec 1937, Haig Papers, vol.17.

⁶¹Haig to Linlithgow, 22 Jan 1938, ibid.

prisoners. On 10 February 1938, Pant told Haig that he had specific orders from the Working Committee to secure the release of the remaining political prisoners in the U.P. before the Haripura Congress, which was scheduled to open on 19 February. Haig responded by refusing to release any more of the remaining prisoners, all of whom had been arrested in connection with offences of violence. Haig was still disappointed at the results of the Parmanand case.⁶²

At about the same time, Srikrishna Sinha, the chief minister of Bihar, was asking the governor of his province to release all remaining political prisoners. There were twenty-three prisoners in Bihar and fifteen prisoners in the U.P. who were considered by the Congress to be political prisoners. All had been convicted of violent or terrorist crimes--attempted murder, robbery, violation of the arms act, fraud, and possession of explosives were among the charges. One of the prisoners had been arrested and charged with the technically violent crime of possessing Communist literature. All had been sentenced by ordinary criminal courts. The British claimed that many of the prisoners were common criminals who had had absolutely no connection with the Congress, or with any other political organization, before their arrests but were considered by the Congress to be political prisoners because they had expressed sympathy with the Congress during their trials or after their imprisonment.⁶³

In fact, the Government of India did not object to the release of these prisoners per se but to the pressure such releases would put on the non-Congress Bengal ministry to release its political prisoners. Lord Zetland was besieged by the pro-India group in Parliament to comply with the Congress demands for the release of these few prisoners. But he told his cabinet colleagues that he could not do so. The release of these prisoners, he said, would have grave consequences in Bengal where 387 terrorists and 250 detenus were still being held: ". . . it is important that nothing should be done elsewhere which would make it more difficult for the ministers in Bengal to maintain their resistance to the demand for the release of their prisoners."⁶⁴

On 15 February, four days before the start of the open session of the Congress, the Congress ministers in Bihar and in the U.P. resigned

⁶² Haig to Linlithgow, 10 Feb 1938, ibid.

⁶³ White Paper on political prisoners in India, Feb 1938, Cmd. 5674 and PS Haig to PS Viceroy, 21 Feb 1938, L/P&J/8/649.

⁶⁴ Cabinet memorandum for the SoS, [74] Feb 1938, L/P&J/8/649.

in protest at the Government of India's continued refusal to allow the release of the prisoners. In his resignation letter, Sinha declared that, although these prisoners had committed acts of violence, they were, like everyone else, subject to the power of Gandhi and the Congress to reform them and persuade them to leave the path of violence.⁶⁵ Pant told Haig that his ministry had far-reaching reforms to carry out but could not do so in the present atmosphere of tension and disquiet. The failure to release the prisoners, said Pant, "is apt to disturb the peaceful atmosphere, to engender tension and to hamper the growth of the non-violent spirit."⁶⁶

The letters of resignation were obviously meant for a wider audience than the two governors they were addressed to. When they were made public, the editorial writer of the Leader chose to describe the resignations as a concession to the leftists, a move forced by Subhas Chandra Bose who had just been elected Congress president.⁶⁷ Gandhi's enemies in Maharashtra drew attention to the timing of the resignations and asked if it wasn't a bit cynical of the Gandhiites (who had not shown great concern for the prisoners for seven months) to resign over the issue now that the Haripura Congress and a showdown with the left was approaching.⁶⁸ Gandhi described the confrontation as a declaration of Congress determination not to be cowed by the Government of India. He noted that the Working Committee had decided to limit the confrontation to the U.P. and Bihar for the time being; they had persuaded the other Congress ministries not to resign in sympathy with the affected ministries.⁶⁹

The Viceroy's advisors tended to lean towards the theory that the resignations were a smoke screen devised by Gandhi to cover the factional squabbles in the Congress. In conveying this opinion to the Secretary of State, Linlithgow said that, whether the theory was true or not, the resignations had the effect of bringing the left and right wings of the Congress together in a general attack on the governors and on the Governor General.⁷⁰ Linlithgow wanted to let the issue ride until after Haripura, when, he thought, the Gandhiites would be reasonable. Zetland agreed and suggested that the Viceroy "drop a hint" to Gandhi that the Government of India was willing to talk about the release of

⁶⁵Sinha to Hallett, 15 Feb 1938, ibid.

⁶⁶Pant to Haig, 15 Feb 1938, ibid.

⁶⁷Leader, 15 Feb 1938.

⁶⁸Mahratta, 17 Feb 1938.

⁶⁹Harijan, 19 Feb 1938.

⁷⁰Linlithgow to Zetland, 18 Feb 1938, Linlithgow Papers, vol.5.

prisoners. What Zetland did not want was to have Gandhi bring the new Congress president, Subhas Bose, into the discussion, which he was afraid would happen if Gandhi were pressed on the issue before the Haripura Congress was completed. "It would obviously be greatly preferable to deal with Gandhi if possible, but difficult if not impossible to see Bose."⁷¹

Whether the timing of the resignations had anything to do with it or not, the Haripura Congress was a great success for the Gandhiites. Working Committee resolutions setting Congress policy towards federation, keeping at a distance the struggle in the Indian States, and approving the recent disciplinary action taken against kisan sabhaites in Bihar and Orissa were all passed without major amendment, despite leftist opposition.⁷² And, though the Gandhiites had sponsored a leftist successor to Jawaharlal, Subhas Bose, his Working Committee was clearly dominated by Gandhiites as Nehru's had been.⁷³ The resolution on the release of prisoners was passed without a division. It damned the governors for their interference in provincial autonomy and gave the Working Committee the power to act as it saw fit in handling the crisis.⁷⁴ In fact, the Gandhiites had acted to ease the settlement of the issue before the Haripura conference and even before the resignations.

The crux of the problem of the release of prisoners was not the few political prisoners in the U.P. and in Bihar but the hundreds of terrorist prisoners and detenus in Bengal. Linlithgow and Lord Brabourne (recently transferred from Bombay to Bengal) felt very uncomfortable at the thought of the non-Congress Bengal ministry being pressured by the Congress into demanding the release of those hundreds of prisoners. On the eve of the crisis Gandhi and the Working Committee acted to relieve some of the pressure on the Bengal ministry by helping to bring about the end of a hunger strike among prisoners in Dacca.⁷⁵

In a public statement made in the first week of February, Gandhi told the prisoners that he needed their cooperation. With it, he said, the Congress could convince the government of its ability to guarantee the good behavior of prisoners it might release.⁷⁶ On 22 February

⁷¹Zetland to Linlithgow, 19 Feb 1938, draft telegram in L/P&J/8/649. Zetland crossed out the words "if not impossible" before approving it for dispatch.

⁷²IAR, 1938, vol.1, pp.280-301.

⁷³Ibid., p.283.

⁷⁴Leader, 18 Feb 1938.

⁷⁵Harijan, 12 Feb 1938.

⁷⁶Ibid.

Linlithgow told the Secretary of State of a decision that was to lead to the peaceful solution of the crisis:⁷⁷

We have, as you know, been very anxious so far as practicable to protect Bengal position, but Brabourne informs me that his home minister is prepared, so far as that position goes, to contemplate release of all political prisoners in the United Provinces and Bihar provided that releases are spaced out and that there is, at least, an appearance of individual examination.

"An appearance of individual examination," the consideration of each prisoner's case on its merits, was exactly what Haig and Linlithgow had been trying to get the Congress to accept, and what the Congress had been refusing, for the previous four months.⁷⁸ Such a formula for the releases in the U.P. and Bihar would, when applied to Bengal, insure against the blanket pardon of the hundreds of political prisoners in the non-Congress provinces. At Haripura Gandhi made a general statement about the crisis in which he hinted that a settlement might be quickly reached if "the Governors are left free to give an assurance that their examination of cases was not intended to be a usurpation of the powers of the Ministers . . ."⁷⁹

On 24 February, two days after the Haripura Congress, Haig told Linlithgow that Pant had agreed to the immediate release of some prisoners and to the release of others "over a period of months, with special examination of individual cases." A similar message with respect to prisoners in Bihar came from Hallett a few hours later.⁸⁰ The ministerial crisis was at an end. At the fourth annual C.S.P. conference (Lahore, 12-14 April), the Congress socialists recorded their appreciation of the work of Congress governments, noting the firm resistance to attempts by the governors of U.P. and Bihar to interfere in the day-to-day affairs of the Congress ministries. Although the C.S.P. had opposed office acceptance "and still holds that view," the party members decided to continue their policy of helpful criticism: ". . . it not only does not intend to embarrass or create difficulties for the Congress Ministries but desires to strengthen them in the manner described above and to help them in carrying out the Congress Election Programme."⁸¹

⁷⁷Linlithgow to Zetland, 22 Feb 1938, L/P&J/8/649.

⁷⁸See Pant-Haig and Haig-Linlithgow correspondence, Nov 1937 to Feb 1938, in Haig Papers and in L/P&J/8/649.

⁷⁹Harijan, 26 Feb 1938.

⁸⁰Linlithgow to Zetland, 24 Feb 1938, L/P&J/8/649.

⁸¹Congress Socialist, 23 Apr 1938.

Shortly after Haripura, the home minister of the Bombay Congress government, K.M. Munshi, reviewed the cases of three prisoners given life sentences in 1921 for murder--the result of mob violence at the time of the Prince of Wales' visit. Munshi decided not to release them, but, when Vallabhbhai Patel heard of the decision, he wrote to Munshi countermanding it. Sir Roger Lumley commented to Linlithgow that Munshi was very unhappy about the affair but was powerless to resist an order from Patel.⁸² The Working Committee did not hesitate to exercise its power over the Congress governments on issues of wide political significance such as the release of political prisoners.

The Central Provinces ministerial crisis of 1938 also began over the release of a prisoner, but it was not primarily a left-right confrontation and shed light on the socialist-Gandhiite conflict mainly in as much as it tended to show the limits of the power of the Working Committee over the Congress ministries a year after the Congress had begun to form provincial governments. The Congress government in C.P. was led by N.B. Khare whose political support came largely from the Marathi-speaking Nagpur area of the C.P. His chief rival, R.S. Shukla, looked to the Hindi-speaking Mahakoshal section of the C.P. for his support. The Gandhiites had great influence in the latter, but not in the former, area, and Khare's leadership rested on a shaky coalition with the Shukla faction.

Shukla should have been able to lead the C.P. Congress Party. The Mahakoshal Congress had many more members than the Nagpur Congress did. But he and his fellow Mahakoshal Congress leader, D.P. Mishra, were unable to agree how to divide the offices of the ministry between themselves when the Congress took office and had allowed Khare to assume the premiership.⁸³ In early February Shukla and Mishra were said to have patched up their differences in order to take the party leadership back from Khare.⁸⁴ The involvement of Khare's Justice Minister, M.Y. Sharif, in a scandal almost gave them their opportunity. Sharif, the only Muslim in Khare's cabinet, raised a furor among local Hindus by agreeing to the pardon--against the advice of reviewing magistrates--of a Muslim who had served one year of a three-year sentence for raping a harijan

⁸²Lumley to Linlithgow, 1 Mar 1938, L/P&J/5/156.

⁸³Their immediate differences dated from the Lucknow Congress election which Mishra accused Shukla of rigging. See Rajendra Prasad's statement of arbitration of the Mahakoshal Congress election dispute, 23 Dec 1935, and Shukla to Prasad, 15 Mar 1936, MPCC Papers, part III, file 7.

⁸⁴R.M. Deshmukh to Khare, 9 Feb 1938, Prasad Papers, file 2C of 1938.

girl. The Working Committee, on advice from Vallabhbhai Patel, forced Sharif to resign and managed to keep the Khare ministry together temporarily.⁸⁵

Within two months, however, the factions in the C.P. ministry were again at each other's throats, exchanging various charges of corruption and nepotism.⁸⁶ In early July Patel became convinced that Khare was planning to sack Mishra and to charge him with corruption. Patel warned Khare that Mishra would be given the opportunity to defend himself and might make countercharges. Patel told Khare not to take any action until the Working Committee (scheduled to meet on the 23rd of the month) had an opportunity to consider the situation.⁸⁷ But Khare decided he couldn't afford to wait; he evidently did not feel confident of the outcome of another Working Committee enquiry.

On 20 July Khare and two of his colleagues resigned from the ministry. Shukla, Mishra, and the remaining cabinet member asked Patel for instructions. Patel said he would like to consult the other members of the Working Committee and would need two days in which to do so. When this information was conveyed to the Governor, Sir Francis Wylie, he said the province could not do without the services of a viable ministry for that length of time. Wylie thereupon dismissed the three stalwarts and, on 21 July, asked Khare (who was still the majority leader of the assembly) to form a new government. Khare did so, excluding Shukla and his colleagues.⁸⁸ This gave the Working Committee the opportunity to take firm action. Khare was accused of being in collusion with the governor, was forced to resign, and was censured by the Working Committee. On the 27th of July a meeting of the C.P. Congress Party, chaired by the Congress president, elected Shukla their new leader. Two days later Shukla formed a new ministry without Khare.⁸⁹

Khare lashed out at the old guard. They had, he said, merely

⁸⁵ Patel's note on the "C.P. Affair," 1/0 Apr/ 1938, AICC file 1 of 1938.

⁸⁶ F. Wylie to Linlithgow, 7 Jun 1938, L/P&J/5/184.

⁸⁷ Patel to Khare, 11 Jul 1938, Aney Papers, part III, file 10.

⁸⁸ Quarterly Survey . . . 31 Jul 1938, pp.2-4, Linlithgow Papers, vol.142.

⁸⁹ Ibid. The Congress version of these events is in IAR, 1938, vol.2, pp.261-69, Khare gives his side of the affair in My Political Memoirs (Nagpur, 1959).

been waiting for a chance to replace him with their syncophantic supporters. Patel said that Khare was behaving like a madman, and he was particularly upset at the attacks on Gandhi in the Marathi press.⁹⁰ M.N. Roy congratulated Khare for standing up to the high command and suggested that they might work together.⁹¹ Khare told Roy that his sacrifice had been necessary to expose the "fascist tendencies" (a term Roy had used in his letter) of the Gandhiites. He expressed an eagerness to meet Congress leftists and to discuss ways in which they might pool their resources.⁹² Roy soon expressed his disappointment at the lack of any "political content" in Khare's speeches,⁹³ but Khare found other allies. He supported Subhas Bose in the 1939 Congress presidential election and in the power struggle that followed the Tripuri Congress.⁹⁴

As they had with the issue of the political prisoners, the Gandhiites chose to make the Government of India the real villain in the events that led to Khare's downfall. Khare, implied Gandhi, had merely been a British tool in an attempt to split the Congress. Gandhi said that, although the Governor might have acted within the law, he acted hastily and unwisely: "If a fight is to be avoided, the Governors must recognise the Congress as the one national organization that is bound some day or other to replace the British Government." Gandhi went on to say that the governors of the U.P. and Bihar had accepted the Congress lead when a crisis faced them--they realized, what, perhaps, Wylie did not, that it was not in their best interests to split the Congress: "The Working Committee's resolution is a friendly warning to the British Government that if they wish to avoid an open rupture with the Congress, the powers that be should not allow a repetition of what happened at Nagpur on the night of 20th July."⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Patel to Prasad, 6 Aug 1938, Prasad Papers, file 4A of 1938. One issue of the paper Swadhan (6 Aug 1938) carried an article entitled "Gandhi and Aurangzeb." Both, according to the article, were "saintly humbugs" who sold their signatures in the bazaar, who kept white mistresses, and who betrayed and sullied their religions. Just as Aurangzeb had ruined the memory of his father, Gandhi ruined the memory of his spiritual father, Tilak. Maharashtra, the article concluded, would destroy Gandhi as it had destroyed Aurangzeb (Wylie to Brabourne, 24 Aug 1938, L/P&J/5/185). Wylie said that Shukla sent the article to Gandhi and asked permission to use the emergency press laws to crush the paper.

⁹¹ Roy to Khare, 4 Aug 1938, M.N. Roy Papers, file LRC-CP/1.

⁹² Khare to Roy, 20 Aug 1938, ibid.

⁹³ Roy to Khare, 20 Aug 1938, ibid.

⁹⁴ See Chapter VII below.

⁹⁵ IAR, 1938, vol.2, p.268.

The facts that the Working Committee waited until July to take direct action in the C.P. ministerial conflict, even though it began investigating the affair in April, and that disciplinary action against Khare was not taken until October, indicate that the Gandhites were sensitive to the pitfalls that accompanied provincial autonomy. They had tried to control the C.P. crisis with a light hand but had ended up using the full weight of their authority. And, although they may have consolidated the position of their supporters in the ministry, they also greatly expanded the ranks of their enemies. In Bombay, Madras, Bihar, and the U.P., Working Committee support of ministerial action against Communists, socialists, and kisan sabhaites also made enemies. And, perhaps most importantly, by taking provincial office, the Congress leaders, identified themselves with the "ins" which alienated a number of "outs." The resources and the patronage available to provincial ministries under the Government of India act were slight. Eighty per cent of the budget was allocated to military and other governmental expenses that the Congress ministers could not change. For every job the Congress governments awarded they left a dozen applicants empty-handed. These things the Gandhites understood when they took office. They were inherent in the July decision to form ministries.

The recently installed U.P. education minister, Sampurnanand, said in September 1938 that the Congress ministers found it much more difficult to supervise the activities of their Indian subordinates than of their English subordinates. The former, he implied, tended to mistrust their countrymen and to hide in a mass of bureaucratic red tape, making it more difficult than it might otherwise have been for the Congress governments to effect any sort of reform. Congress, said Sampurnanand, realized it had aroused hopes in the masses that it could not satisfy, given the limitations of the Government of India Act. For example, he said, after pre-determined expenses, the U.P. education ministry was left with a total of Rs. 2000 to apply to the unemployment problem.⁹⁶ In the circumstances, no party could have run a government without disappointing friends and making enemies, but on one or two issues the Gandhites made enemies they needn't have. The compulsory teaching of Hindi in secondary schools in south India is a case in point.

The Congress claimed to represent an Indian nation, and, since 1920,

⁹⁶Congress Socialist, 3 Sep 1938.

the Gandhites had been promoting Hindi as a national language.⁹⁷ It was, to the nationalists, a disgrace that a U.P. politician in Tamil Nadu, for instance, had a better chance of being understood in English than in his native Hindi. Speaking at the opening of the Karachi Congress (March 1931), Gandhi berated the delegates from south India for not using Hindi, the official language of the Congress. He called this an act of tyranny by the minority and said they could easily learn Hindi in three months, studying three hours a day.⁹⁸ In June 1934, Gandhi told a group of students at the Women's University of Poona that, if he had his way, Hindi would be made compulsory and English optional at the university level instead of vice versa.⁹⁹

In July 1937 Jawaharlal Nehru wrote that, although he felt that primary-school students should be taught in their native language, they should be compelled to learn Hindi at the secondary level: "Such a Basic Hindustani should be the all-India language, and with a little effort from the State it will spread with extreme rapidity all over the country and will help in bringing about that national unity which we all desire."¹⁰⁰ The "effort from the state" to establish Hindi as a national language was most evident, and created the greatest dissatisfaction, in Madras.

In December 1937 a Congress minister was stoned and pelted with mud by a crowd of harijans and Muslim Leaguers in Salem who were protesting the fact that the ministry had delayed temple-entry legislation in order to concentrate on a bill to make the teaching of Hindi compulsory.¹⁰¹ By mid-June, the ministry was under such a storm of criticism that it felt compelled to release a public statement reassuring its Tamil- and Telugu-speaking constituents that the bill applied only to secondary schools (1st, 2nd, and 3rd form--roughly equivalent to 6th, 7th, and 8th grades). The study of the vernacular would also be mandatory, and there would be no attempt to replace the vernacular as the general medium of instruction.¹⁰² At about this time, opponents of the bill began providing

⁹⁷The Gandhites wanted their language to be called Hindustani. It was to be a combination of Hindi and Urdu and could be written in either the Arabic or Devanagiri script. Despite the fact that Hindustani had been the official Congress language since 1920, the overwhelming majority of Congress documents and correspondence between the Congress leaders was in English throughout the period of my study.

⁹⁸Searchlight, 30 Mar 1931.

⁹⁹CWMG, vol.58, p.95.

¹⁰⁰Nehru, Unity of India, p.254. My emphasis.

¹⁰¹Hindu, 27 Dec 1937.

¹⁰²Harijan, 18 Jun 1938.

free transportation to Tamil speakers to go to Madras City to protest and to picket the Congress ministry. The Congress tried to organize counter-demonstrations. And, in the rural areas of Madras, touring ministers were being greeted by black-flag demonstrations. The anti-Brahmin element was citing the compulsory teaching of Hindi as an attempt to stifle Dravidian culture.¹⁰³

Rajagopalachari began having the protestors arrested and prosecuted under the emergency powers acts. Lord Erskine told Lord Brabourne, the acting Viceroy, that he was not sure how long Rajaji intended to keep up the arrests, but he felt that, if the stern measures taken by the ministry did not have a quick and beneficial effect, the Congress position in Madras would deteriorate rapidly.¹⁰⁴ The British were able to take some comfort from Rajaji's difficulties now that they were in a position to advise restraint in the use of repressive legislation. In August Lord Zetland, commenting on a hartal against the Madras Debt Relief Act, said that Congress "pigeons seem to be coming home to roost in Madras . . . I wonder what further use of the much abused repressive measures Rajagopalachari will feel called upon to make!"¹⁰⁵

Rajaji was in difficulty on a number of fronts. In July 1938 the Working Committee had found it necessary to attempt to quiet Congress delegates from Andhra, Kerala, and Karnatak who had been agitating against the Madras and Bombay ministries for their inaction on proposals to create linguistically-defined administrative units in those areas. The Gandhiites assured these delegates that both the Parliamentary Subcommittee (and thus Congress governments) and the Working Committee itself supported the creation of such units and had so instructed the Congress Party members in the Madras and Bombay legislatures. But, said the old guard, such schemes had to await the coming of independence. Meanwhile, they said, the proponents of such action would only hurt the Congress by continuing to weaken the Congress ministries.¹⁰⁶

As the Madras ministry began to make extensive use of the emergency powers acts (particularly of the sedition laws), the protests and pickets increased in intensity, and socialists and other Congress leftists began to lend their voices to the attack on the Madras government. In August

¹⁰³FR, Madras, 2nd half of Jun 1938.

¹⁰⁴Erskine to Brabourne, 23 Jun 1938, L/P&J/5/198.

¹⁰⁵Zetland to Brabourne, 8 Aug 1938, Linlithgow Papers, vol.6.

¹⁰⁶IAR, 1938, vol.2, p.259.

M.N. Roy claimed that Rajaji had thus far sent over 150 anti-Hindi pickets to jail. Roy was particularly caustic in his attack on Rajaji's use of the sedition acts.¹⁰⁷ At one point Rajaji told the Madras police to be less zealous in arresting pickets who were actually in front of his house.¹⁰⁸ He evidently felt that such arrests had an adverse effect on his image. As of the end of September 1938, there had been 349 arrests and 330 convictions of anti-Hindi demonstrators.¹⁰⁹ One indication of the reaction to these arrests might have been evident in the fact that the Congress lost its majority in the Madras Corporation in October 1938.¹¹⁰

Since May 1938 kisan sabhaites and Congress socialists had been organizing meetings and protests against the U.P. ministry for delays in the implementation of the tenancy reform bill.¹¹¹ In Bihar, in June 1938, the Governor described a situation in which Congress leftists were faced with an alliance of ministerial and zamindari interests in a fight over the Bihar tenancy amendment bill.¹¹² In July the Bombay ministry was still unsuccessfully trying to form a mill-workers union in competition with the Communist Girni Kamgar union.¹¹³ Governor Lumley noted that the Congress government had stepped up its use of the emergency powers act in July and August in order to silence "scurrilous statements about a number of prominent people in Bombay" which included the Congress ministers, of course.¹¹⁴ Sir Robert Reid, acting Governor of Bengal, told the Viceroy that his ministry could not use the emergency powers acts against its enemies (Congressmen, by and large) because each faction in the coalition ministry was afraid that, once such a procedure was begun, it would eventually be used against the minority parties in the government.¹¹⁵ Thus, for rather odd reasons perhaps, there was a measure of civil liberty in Bengal that did not exist in the Congress provinces themselves.

¹⁰⁷ Independent India, 21 Aug 1938.

¹⁰⁸ Erskine to Brabourne (Acting Viceroy), 8 Aug 1938, Erskine Papers, vol.13.

¹⁰⁹ FR, Madras, 1st half of Oct 1938.

¹¹⁰ Erskine to Brabourne, 19 Oct 1938, L/P&J/5/199. One of Erskine's first acts under section 93 government was to repeal the compulsory Hindi law. Erskine to Linlithgow, 4 Nov 1939, L/P&J/5/201.

¹¹¹ FR, U.P., 1st half of May 1938.

¹¹² Sir T. Stewart to Brabourne, 25 Jun 1938, Brabourne Papers, vol.63.

¹¹³ Lumley to Brabourne, 2 Jul 1938, L/P&J/5/156.

¹¹⁴ Lumley to Brabourne, 1 Sep 1938, ibid., vol.157.

¹¹⁵ Reid to Brabourne, 22 Aug 1938, Linlithgow Papers, vol.38.

The storm over the Congress ministries' use of the emergency powers acts broke at the September 1938 meeting of the A.I.C.C. Speaking for the Working Committee, Bhulabhai Desai introduced a resolution defending the Congress governments in their efforts to "defend life and property." Desai said that the Congress had been faced with groups that advocated class war, violence, and even murder in the name of civil liberty. The Congress governments, said Desai, would be remiss in their duty to the public if they did not use whatever measures necessary to stop such activity. At the height of the debate, as the resolution seemed certain to be approved, approximately fifty A.I.C.C. members--socialists, Communists, Royists, and kisan sabhaites--walked out of the meeting.¹¹⁶ The showdown, such as it was, had been preceded by an act of the Working Committee which, three weeks earlier, had expelled two socialists, Dr. Z.A. Ahmed and Dr. Rammanohar Lohia, from the "secretariat" of the A.I.C.C.¹¹⁷

In November, as the heat generated by Congress dissidents increased, M.N. Roy listed some of the complaints of the left wing of the Congress. According to Roy, Congressmen in Bihar and Orissa could not even join kisan sabhas without facing disciplinary action. The P.C.C.s in Maharashtra and Bombay had forbidden Congressmen from speaking against the Bombay industrial disputes bill and were supporting the Bombay ministry's action against those who did not obey the directive. And, said Roy, dissenting Congress members were being denied a place on the Congress ticket in local and municipal elections--the Congress had begun supporting any candidate who could win an election, no matter what his political connections had been, no matter how reactionary his political views.¹¹⁸

Lord Erskine felt that the A.I.C.C. meeting in Delhi had, in effect, put a stamp of approval on Rajaji's handling of the leftists. The Madras ministry, he said, now seemed to have a free hand in dealing with "left-wing agitators."¹¹⁹ In November British observers in Bihar

¹¹⁶Hindustan Times, 27 Sep 1938. See also J.P. Haithcox, Communism and Nationalism in India, p.281. Haithcox quotes an unpublished letter from M.N. Roy to V.B. Karnik, 28 Sep 1938, to the effect that the C.S.P. was split as to whether or not it would walk out of the meeting, Roy said that M.R. Masani and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya stayed behind when the others left.

¹¹⁷Tribune, 3 Sep 1938. The "secretariat," an economic and foreign department of the A.I.C.C., was formed by Jawaharlal Nehru during his presidency.

¹¹⁸Independent India, 6 Nov 1938.

¹¹⁹Erskine to Brabourne, 7 Oct 1938, L/P&J/5/199.

reported that the conflict between the kisan sabhaites and supporters of the ministry seemed to be increasing in the weeks after the Delhi meeting.¹²⁰ And in the same few weeks, the Governor of the U.P. was pressing the Congress ministry to take action against the recently-expelled Sahajanand and the C.S.P. agitator S.S. Batliwala, who were both touring the province, making revolutionary speeches. Pant did have Batliwala expelled from the sensitive Cawnpore area but was reluctant to have either man arrested.¹²¹ According to Haig, Mrs. Vijaya-lakshmi Pandit, member of the U.P. ministry and secretary of the P.C.C., said that Pant was still under attack from the left wing of the party and was in a weaker position than he had been in a year earlier. Haig felt that a showdown between the left and right wings of the Congress was imminent.¹²² It came in the next few months with the reelection of Subhas Chandra Bose to the Congress presidency.

In 1939 Subhas Bose formed an anti-Gandhiite coalition which, for a time, threatened the old guard's preeminent position in the Congress. The conditions which led to that coalition had existed previously. Various provincial factions and locally-powerful politicians had, in 1937 and 1938, expressed their dissatisfaction with Working Committee policies. Some Congress leaders, such as K.F. Nariman and N.B. Khare, offered to support a leftist move against the Gandhiites. But, despite the opportunities presented to them, the Congress socialists were unable or unwilling to throw in their lot with these dissaffected factions and to launch an attack on the Gandhiites.

In July 1937, the C.S.P. had greeted the Congress decision to accept office with the expressed hope that radical Congress budgets and proposals for extensive reform would quickly provide a platform on which to base a continued vigorous assault on the Raj. But despite socialist pressure, the Gandhiites elected to pursue a moderate legislative program, ignoring leftist demands for a confrontation with the British. The Congress socialists were then left with the choice of cooperating with the Gandhiites or of attempting to split the Congress on the issue. They chose the former course and agreed to offer what they called critical support. The C.S.P. also opposed the Congress ministries' use of the

¹²⁰FR, Bihar, 1st half of Nov 1938.

¹²¹Haig to Linlithgow, 22 Nov 1938, Haig Papers, vol.2a. Batliwala was later imprisoned by the Bengal ministry. FR, Bengal, 1st half of Aug 1939.

¹²²Haig to Linlithgow, 23 Nov 1938, Linlithgow Papers, vol.101.

emergency powers acts and of the sedition laws. But, again, when faced with the alternative of an open break with the Gandhiites, they accepted this too. The socialist walkout at the Delhi meeting of the A.I.C.C. was as near as the C.S.P. would come to defying the Gandhiites, and, as shall be shown, when the final choice came at Tripuri, the C.S.P. chose to stay on the winning side.

The Gandhiites' successes in these confrontations with opponents in the Congress resulted from a talent they had of submerging internal division in the Congress in a convenient argument with the Raj. As a showdown of sorts appeared on the horizon at Haripura, the Working Committee was able to arrange an emergency over a few unreleased political prisoners. What is more, they chose an issue that could be limited to the two provinces of U.P. and Bihar and that could be resolved quickly when the internal conflict had passed. There were to be more opportunities to use this tactic in the critical year of 1939.

CHAPTER VI

Socialists and Congress Policy Towards the Princely States, 1934-38.

Although the Nagpur Congress constitution (1920) included the population of Indian states in associated Congress provinces for the purpose of allocating delegates to such provinces, it also stipulated that "the inclusion of Indian States in the electorate shall not be taken to include any interference by the Congress with the internal affairs of such States."¹ Commenting on the constitution, in January 1921, Gandhi said that if the Congress accepted his lead it would concentrate its efforts on the struggle against the Raj and would leave the affairs of the states to the people of the states: "The Congress claims to dictate to the British Government but it cannot do so by the very nature of its constitution in respect to the Native States." He did say that the Congress was free to air the "grievances and aspirations" of the states people but it would not support hostile demonstrations in the states against the rulers of the states.²

During the next fourteen years the Gandhiites consistently pursued a policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of the Indian states, resisting the pleas of opposing political factions to combine the freedom struggle with the fight for the reform of the princely states. Writing in Navajivan in April 1924, Gandhi praised the efforts of agriculturalists in Udaipur and Travancore States who had recently won concessions from their rulers by conducting satyagrahas. But he told Congress members not to participate in or support such campaigns. Gandhi assured his followers that their efforts at over-

¹Art.8, 1920 Congress constitution, CWMG, vol.19, p.192. The constitution made the states a potential source of Working Committee patronage. The Working Committee, given the approval of the A.I.C.C., could assign particular states to particular Congress provinces, based on geographic and linguistic affinities. The P.C.C.s could then assign the states under their jurisdiction to district committees as they saw fit. With the right to represent an Indian state in the Congress came an allocation of delegates in proportion to the population of the state. And it may well be that the Congressmen who were most ardently espousing the rights of states people were those who felt they had not received their fair share of states delegates from the Working Committee. For information on the distribution of the various states to the P.C.C.s, see AICC file G35 (pt.VII) of 1938.

²CWMG, vol.19, p.199.

throwing the British Raj would be a much more effective way of helping the people of the states than would any direct participation in the states struggle: "When the Congress has won its goal, the problem of the States will have been automatically solved."³

As the British Government reviewed its policy towards the Indian princes in preparation for the Round Table Conferences and the next step to follow the Montagu Chelmsford reforms, political activists in the states began to organize a popular counter-force to the princes' diplomatic representatives in London. In 1927 both the Parliamentary committee on the states (the Butler Committee) and the All-India States Peoples Conference were formed.⁴ With the increased political temperature in the states came greater and greater pressure on the Gandhiites to allow direct Congress participation in the states peoples battles. In August 1927 Motilal Nehru told a group of Congressmen from Bangalore State that the Congress leaders would not support non-cooperation in the states. He asked those states people who wished to participate in the freedom struggle to come out of the states and join the Congress. He also told them that they would have to deal with the states internal problems in their own way.⁵

The Madras Congress session (December 1927) approved a resolution asking the rulers of the Indian states to form representative governments at an early stage.⁶ But this did not satisfy Congress leftists who had taken up the cause of the repressed states people. In May 1928 Jawaharlal Nehru presided at a meeting of the Kerala P.C.C. which demanded that any future Indian constitution guarantee the incorporation of the states in free India and that it provide for responsible government in the states.⁷ The following session of the Congress (Calcutta, December 1928) repeated the call for the introduction of responsible government in the states and, for the first time, expressed its "sympathy with and support for the legitimate and peaceful struggle" in the states.⁸ The Gandhiites went so far as to allow the constitutional

³Ibid., vol.23, p.471.

⁴For a general discussion of the problem of the Indian States in the independence movement, see Urmila Phadnis, Towards the Integration of the Indian States, 1919-47, (London, 1968).

⁵Hindu (weekly), 11 Aug 1927.

⁶IAR, 1927, vol.2, p.411.

⁷Ibid., 1928, vol.1, p.419.

⁸AICC, Report of the 43rd INC (n.p., 1928).

restriction on Congress activity in the states to be removed.⁹

Speaking at the Lahore Congress (December 1929), Jawaharlal said that the Indian princes would go when India was free unless they agreed to serve the people and that only the people of the states could determine the future of the states. Nehru warned against any attempt by the British to impose a political settlement on a federal India. The Congress stood for self-determination in British India, he said, and could hardly deny it to the states peoples. In no case would the Congress ignore their struggle.¹⁰ Once again, at Lahore as in preceding Congress sessions, the Congress demanded that the princes give their people responsible government including: freedom of movement, speech, assembly, and freedom from threats to persons and property.¹¹

In February 1931, when it was suggested that Gandhi represent the Congress at the Second Round Table Conference in London, delegates from the States Peoples Conference asked Gandhi not to approve any federal scheme which perpetuated the iniquitous rule of the princes.¹² The delegates added that the states people welcomed federation and a central legislative assembly, provided that their representatives to such an assembly were freely elected from among themselves and not merely appointed by the princes.¹³ The Working Committee responded by assuring the people of the states that they were welcome to join any federal government of India and that the Congress would not agree to any scheme which tended to perpetuate "the present autocracy."¹⁴

In May 1931 N.C. Kelkar, a resident of Maharashtra who had been born in princely India, told a conference of Miraj State subjects that they would be part of any future federation. He warned his listeners not to hurl empty threats in the faces of their rulers but, if they were forced to pursue satyagraha, to do so with a "definite point of aim, a strict limited scope and [with] the conditions of honourable compromise always in view."¹⁵ A few weeks later, the All-India States Peoples Conference (Bombay, June 1931) published a set of minimum demands to be put forth at the Round Table Conference. These included: 1) federal citizenship for the people of the states with the same fundamental rights as possessed by the people of British India; 2) federal judicial machinery

⁹Leader, 4 Jan 1929.

¹⁰IAR, 1929, vol.2, p.293.

¹²Searchlight, 5 Feb 1931.

¹⁴Searchlight, 19 Mar 1931.

¹¹Ibid., p.310.

¹³Bombay Chronicle, 9 Feb 1931.

¹⁵Mahratta, 31 May 1931.

to protect such rights; 3) direct representation of the states peoples in any central legislature; 4) a states judiciary to be linked with a federal supreme court. The conference delegates expressed their confidence in Gandhi's ability to secure their rights.¹⁶ British observers estimated that only about 300 of the 2000 persons who attended the conference were actually from the states. They also said that the major speeches at the conference were made by Kamala Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, M.M. Maliviya, and other Congress luminaries.¹⁷

After the collapse of the Round Table Conference, the political aspiration of the states people received little specific attention from the leaders of the Congress until the C.D. movement came to an end in 1934. At one point Lord Willingdon complained at the plans of the Maharaja of Mysore who, supposedly, intended to treat Gandhi as an honored guest during one of the latter's tours for the removal of untouchability. Willingdon told the Secretary of State that he had warned the Maharaja of the difficulties this might create for other princes who were fighting Congress agitation for political reform.¹⁸ But, Willingdon's remarks to the contrary, Congress agitation in the princely states was almost nonexistent during the period of civil disobedience.¹⁹

In May 1934 Gandhi took up the problem of the states in a letter to the erstwhile leader of the Congress Socialist Party, M.R. Masani. Gandhi told Masani that the Congress had to concentrate its activities in British India, that British India was surely a large enough territory for any political party. The Mahatma added that he did not favor the abolition of princely powers but, rather, the reformation of princely rule in "consonance with the true spirit of democracy."²⁰ In June N.C. Kelkar wrote to Gandhi, asking for a greater Congress role in the princely states.

Kelkar wanted the Congress to take a more militant posture in support of the reform movement in the states: "The Congress has now

¹⁶Leader, 13 Jun 1931. See also "Memorandum . . . to the Working Committee," in AICC file G157 of 1931.

¹⁷FR, Bombay, 1st half of Jun 1931.

¹⁸Willingdon to Hoare, 17 Dec 1933, Templewood Papers, vol.7.

¹⁹There was some slight political activity in the states, but even the Viceroy's political agents did not tend to ascribe it to Congress agitation. Many states rulers, however, took advantage of the mood of repression in British India to crush reform groups in their domains, whether or not such groups were actively supporting either the Congress or civil disobedience. See the file on Congress activity in the states, L/P&S/13/831.

²⁰Gandhi to Masani, 29 May 1934, CWMG, vol.58, p.36.

given up its traditional policy of 'keeping itself unspotted' from the States. It recruits members in the States and brings them under the control of its district and provincial committees." Kelkar went on to say that these people were adding to the strength of the Congress and, therefore, the Congress was obligated to support them in their struggle. He quoted the Calcutta resolution of 1928 which allowed Congress participation in states affairs. He then said ". . . we are anxious to know whether elections of State's people and Declaration of Rights in their interest are, in your opinion, merely desirable features of a federation or essential conditions thereof."²¹

Gandhi told Kelkar that he had not pledged Congress to federation. The states were independent entities, he said, and, although they might be part of geographic India, so were Portuguese and French India. Gandhi agreed that the Congress did enroll members in the states, but he said it did not intend to interfere in the internal affairs of the states. Such interference would only damage the cause of states freedom, said Gandhi. And he implied that it would also detract from the Congress campaign in British India: "I am of opinion that whatever we are able to accomplish in British India is bound to affect the States."²²

In April 1935 the Jubbulpore meeting of the A.I.C.C. declared its support for the states peoples struggle for freedom, saying that it held their interests as dear as it held those of the people of British India.²³ In August the Working Committee published a clarification which reiterated the Congress call for responsible government in the states. But, according to the Working Committee, the responsibility for achieving reform rested with the people of the states. Congress would not interfere except to offer advice and moral support, although the committee did pledge never to make any deal with the princes against the interests of their subjects.²⁴ A reply from the States Peoples Conference was quick in coming. They felt that by accepting the British notion of two separate Indias (British and native states), the Congress was reinforcing the British hold on the sub-continent.²⁵

It was at this time that the C.S.P. took up the demands of the States Peoples Conference in their developing struggle with the

²¹Kelkar to Gandhi, 22 Jun 1934, ibid., p.456.

²²Gandhi to Kelkar, 2 Jul 1934, ibid., pp.136-7.

²³IAR, 1935, vol.1, p.297.

²⁴Ibid., vol.2, p.224.

²⁵Mahratta, 18 Aug 1935.

Gandhiites. When, in October 1935, Vallabhbhai Patel introduced the Working Committee's states resolution at the A.I.C.C. meeting in Madras, Yusuf Meherally objected strongly. Meherally tried to have a pledge of Congress support for states peoples participation in any future constituent assembly inserted into the resolution. Patel replied to this and other criticism, saying that it made absolutely no sense for the Congress to take on a burden that it could not carry, no matter how much they might sympathise with the justice of the states peoples cause. The resolution, maintaining Congress non-interference in the states, was passed by a vote of thirty-four to two.²⁶ The issue now went to the Lucknow session of the Congress (April 1936).

In his opening speech at Lucknow, Jawaharlal gave some support to those who differed with the Gandhiites as to the proper reaction to the struggle in the states.²⁷

The future has no place for autocracy or feudalism; a free India cannot tolerate the subjection of many of her children and their deprivation of human rights, nor can it ever agree to a dissection of its body and a cutting up of its limbs. If we stand for any human, political, social or economic rights for ourselves, we stand for those identical rights for the people of the States.

In the debate over the States resolution, the opponents of non-interference in the states claimed that the Working Committee resolution of August 1935 was a retrograde step which nullified the Calcutta resolution of 1928. A compromise wording was put forth to the effect that the responsibility for reform in princely India was "mainly" the responsibility of the states peoples, but was rejected by a vote of 218 to 176. The original resolution (maintaining Congress non-interference in the states) was then carried without a division.²⁸ The Gandhiites did, however, acquiesce to the addition of a paragraph to Nehru's resolution on civil liberties, which was probably intended to mollify their opponents on states policy.²⁹

The Congress realizes that the effective power behind the States is that of British officers. Howsoever the responsibility for this deplorable state of affairs might be shared between the British Government and the Rulers of the States, the Congress declares that it can recognise no differentiation as between the States and the rest of India.

After Lucknow, the implementation of the 1935 Government of India Act, and the prospects of provincial autonomy and of a federation

²⁶IAR, 1935, vol.2, pp.276-82.

²⁷Ibid., 1936, vol.1, p.274.

²⁸Ibid., p.287.

²⁹Ibid., pp.247-8.

of British and princely India, added to the debate on Congress policy towards the states. A solid block of princes would act as a firm counterbalance to Congress delegates in a future federal assembly. Under the 1935 Act the princes would nominate about one-third of the delegates to a proposed federal assembly. With additional seats reserved for Muslim and other minority groups, the Congress would have no hope of controlling such an assembly unless it could exercise some influence over the delegates from the states. Thus, as federation became a possibility, no matter how much the leaders of the Congress deplored the idea in public, they were forced to become involved in the political affairs of princely India.

In June 1937 intelligence officers of the Government of India estimated that the probable strength of the Congress in a federal assembly, if it were instituted at that time, would be about 100 in a legislature of 346 seats.³⁰ Eighteen months later, the British estimated that the Congress had improved its potential strength by about 25 percent and might be able to achieve a near-majority in the assembly.³¹ Obviously, the likelihood of the Congress agreeing to an Indian federation under the Government of India Act would be greatly increased if the Congress could control enough of the states seats to gain a majority in the assembly. Such a situation could be achieved either through an understanding with the princes or through the establishment of some form of popular election of delegates in the states. Both avenues to increased Congress power in the states were explored by the various factions in the Congress.

Lord Linlithgow himself was fairly sanguine about the possibilities of an arrangement being reached whereby the Congress, or at least its most powerful leaders, would accept a form of federation under the Government of India Act. During discussions with the Viceroy in late 1937 and early 1938, G.D. Birla said that Gandhi's major objections to the Act and to federation were: 1) the principle of nomination by the princes of the states representatives in a federal assembly and 2) the reservation to the Governor General of defense and foreign policy. Gandhi, said Birla, would not require absolute surrender on point one if the larger princes (he cited Mysore as an example) used their existing legislatures to select nominees, and he would accept point two if the

³⁰ Zetland to Linlithgow, 21 Jun 1937, Zetland Papers, vol.9.

³¹ Quarterly Survey . . . 31 Jan 1939, p.26, Linlithgow Papers, vol.142.

Viceroy indicated that it was to be only a temporary arrangement subject to future discussion. The Mahatma was very flexible, said Birla.³²

In April 1938 Bhulabhai Desai told Linlithgow that the political situation in the states was more hopeful than might have appeared to be the case. The states, he said, might be ready for reform in two or three years at which time a federal plan might be workable. The Congress, said Desai, would put a growing pressure on the princes. At the same time, S. Satyamurti told the Viceroy that "even a slight gesture" by the Maharaja of Mysore and by the rulers of one or two other large states would give Gandhi the ammunition he needed to persuade the Congress to approve a federal scheme.³³ Rajagopalachari was slightly more cautious than Desai and Satyamurti had been. In May Rajaji told Governor Erskine that his objections to federation would be largely eliminated if the princes were required to allow elections for the selection of delegates to a central assembly.³⁴ T.B. Saprú was convinced that Gandhi, Patel, and a majority of the Congress would accept federation subject to the "modification" of the method of selecting states delegates.³⁵

Gandhi himself was quite willing to encourage the Viceroy's hopes for a compromise with the Congress. On 20 January 1938 Gandhi spoke to the chairman of the Parliamentary Franchise Committee, Lord Lothian. Gandhi gave Lothian a letter saying that his greatest ambition was to have the Congress recognized as the only party in India that represented all minorities, including the people of the states. Once the unique position of the Congress was recognized, said Gandhi, the Government of India would not hesitate to postpone the inauguration of federation until it had satisfied a few of the demands of the Congress. This would not present any difficulty, said Gandhi, if, before the princes were admitted to a federal assembly, the people of the states were granted a few elementary civil rights, including representation in the federal assembly through elections. A final peace, said Gandhi, demanded the eventual rejection of the Government of India Act and the convocation of an all-India constituent assembly. This was firm Congress policy. But Gandhi implied that these larger goals could be postponed if the states problem

³²Linlithgow to Zetland, 3 Dec 1937 and 11 Feb 1938, Linlithgow Papers, vols. 4 & 5.

³³Linlithgow to Zetland, 13 Apr 1938, Zetland Papers, vol.15.

³⁴Erskine to Linlithgow, 17 May 1938, Erskine Papers, vol.10.

³⁵M. Hallett to Brabourne, 7 Aug 1938, Hallett Papers, vol.1.

were settled to the satisfaction of the Congress.³⁶

Lothian told the Viceroy that, during their two-hour conversation, Gandhi had assured him the leaders of the Congress were willing to discuss federation. Gandhi, said Lothian, suggested that the Viceroy talk to the Congress president, Subhas Bose. Gandhi said that Bose would do what the Working Committee told him to do and that the Working Committee would not demand what the Government of India could not deliver. Lothian gained the impression that, if some of the princes agreed to grant elementary civil liberties to their people and allowed some of their people to participate in elections to a federal assembly, Gandhi would press the Congress to allow the implementation of the 1935 Act. The Act could become fully operational when the princes agreed to freely elected representatives, but it had to be agreed beforehand that at some future date there would be a constituent assembly which could amend the Act to suit Indian conditions. Lothian was very enthusiastic and told Linlithgow he was convinced that Gandhi would promote federation in direct proportion to the development of civil liberties in the states. Lothian also felt that the princes would surely realize they would be better protected from extremists by committed moderates elected from amongst their subjects than by an appointed "mob of court dummies."³⁷

When he communicated the above to the Secretary of State, Linlithgow implied that he didn't share Lothian's high regard for the intelligence of the princes. But the Viceroy did say that Gandhi's statement represented a definite advance towards federation. He felt it would be wise for the Government of India to stand firm and see what developed. It was not a good idea, he thought, "to come into the market too early."³⁸ In April 1938 Linlithgow mentioned intelligence reports which indicated that Congress moderates were planning to work federation. The Bengal C.I.D. said that Gandhi had recently held a secret conference with Congress leaders and had asked them to follow his program for the next four years even if it meant the acceptance of federation. After that time, said Gandhi, Congress would have gained control of the diverse political elements in the country and could launch an effective civil disobedience campaign if that were necessary.³⁹ Whether or not such a program was actually under consideration by the Gandhiites, it was

³⁶Gandhi to "Lord Lothian and Responsible Statesmen Only," 20 Jan 1938, Lothian Papers, vol.176.

³⁷Linlithgow to Zetland, 28 Jan 1938, Zetland Papers, vol.15.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Linlithgow to Zetland, 6 Apr 1938, Linlithgow Papers, vol.5.

certainly feared by Congress leftists.

On 17 January 1938 Subhas Bose, who was about to return from Europe to accept the Congress presidency at Haripura, spoke to Lord Zetland in London about the 1935 Act. Bose said that his major objection to federation under the Act was that Indians would not control the army or defense spending. Bose suggested that the Government of India allow Indians to raise an army in Bengal to be part of an Indian-controlled defense force. Bose added that he too objected to the unacceptable nature of the princes' power in the proposed federal assembly.⁴⁰

The editor of the Congress Socialist warned, in January 1938, that the signs of a compromise were in the air. The Congress high command, he said, was starting down the road that had led to the acceptance of provincial autonomy. Soon, he said, federation would be forced upon the Congress.⁴¹ Subhas Bose took up this line when he returned to India and began to speak about the possible necessity of a renewed C.D. movement against federation.⁴² But at his opening speech at Haripura (February 1938) Bose said there was no possibility of Congress accepting the federal constitution. Congress would fight any attempt to impose federation with non-violent non-cooperation, he said, and any such campaign would surely involve the states people.⁴³ As the year progressed, Bose had the opportunity to harden his stand against federation and to make leftist allies in a potential anti-federation coalition.

During the early summer Bhulabhai Desai was widely reported to have said, on a visit to London, that Congress would accept federation just as it had accepted provincial autonomy. This gave Bose the excuse for a rousing speech in which he declared himself prepared to resign the Congress presidency "in order to be free to carry on a raging and tearing campaign against the federal scheme." British observers who reported this speech believed that Bose was being pressed by his radical supporters in Bengal to create a crisis in the Congress in order to facilitate an open **break** with the Gandhiites.⁴⁴ In July the Government of India reported that Jayaprakash Narayan spent some time in conference with Bose. They were said to be discussing the formation of an "anti-

⁴⁰Zetland to Linlithgow, 24 Jan 1938, ibid.

⁴¹Congress Socialist, 22 Jan 1938.

⁴²Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, 8 Feb 1938, L/P&J/5/184.

⁴³IAR, 1938, vol.1, p.345.

⁴⁴Quarterly Survey . . . 31 Jul 1938, pp.30-1, Linlithgow Papers, vol.142.

federation" bloc consisting of Bose's Bengali supporters and the C.S.P.⁴⁵ Later in the month, Bose brought down the ire of the Working Committee with a speech in which he referred to a "very strong party in the Congress which is prepared to accept federation."⁴⁶

In January 1938 Bhulabhai Desai had advised the Viceroy to approach the federation issue slowly in order to give the leaders of the Congress two or three years to bring about some sort of reform in the princely states. In August he told the Acting Governor General, Lord Brabourne, that if the Government of India intended to do something about federation, it had better do it quickly. Otherwise, said Desai, the leftists would have the time to increase their agitation against the Act to such an extent that the moderates could not overcome it.⁴⁷ Gandhi tried to defuse the situation by assuring Congressmen that there was no great plot to spring federation on the country. He said that there was really no difference of opinion between himself and Jawaharlal regarding federation. In fact, said the Mahatma, he had made it a habit to defer to Nehru whenever they differed over political matters.⁴⁸

An obvious way for the leftists to exploit their stand over the issue of federation was to link it with an expansion of their efforts to increase their agitation for the reform of the princely states. Conversely, it behooved the Gandhiites, who wished to keep the debate over federation on a low key, to try to prevent the leftists from gaining any political ground in the princely states. The Gandhiites could keep their options open on federation only if they controlled socialist agitation in the states.

In April 1937 the Congress Socialist quoted a letter from Jawaharlal Nehru to E.M.S. Namboodripad, the leader of the C.S.P. in Kerala. Namboodripad had asked Nehru if the Working Committee's policy of non-interference in the states prevented him from forming Congress committees in Kerala's associated states. Nehru said that there was no difference in Congress policy towards political activity in the states and political activity in the rest of India. Subject to his avoiding "active conflict," said Nehru, Namboodripad was allowed and, indeed, was expected to form Congress committees in the states and to work there

⁴⁵FR, Bihar, 2nd half of July 1938, L/P&J/5/171.

⁴⁶Quoted in Brabourne to Zetland, 5 Aug 1938, Linlithgow Papers, vol.6.

⁴⁷Zetland to Brabourne, 2 Sep 1938, Brabourne Papers, vol.61.

⁴⁸Harijan, 1 Oct 1938.

as he would elsewhere. Despite this avowal from the Congress president, said the editor, socialists in areas of Gandhiite strength (he singled out Gujerat) had been forcefully prevented from carrying out political activity in the states.⁴⁹ In subsequent weeks the C.S.P. continued to criticise Gandhiite policy towards the states and proposed the formation of a special department of the Congress to deal with the states problem.⁵⁰

At the A.I.C.C. meeting in Calcutta in November 1937 the C.S.P. asked the Congress to protest the repression of Congressmen by the Maharaja of Mysore. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya said that a vital branch of the Congress, the Mysore Congress Committee, was being stifled and demanded that Congressmen take action to support their brothers in Mysore. The Gandhiites suggested that the matter be referred to the Working Committee for further consideration but were overruled. A resolution deploring the action of the Maharaja of Mysore and supporting the protestors was passed.⁵¹ Gandhi was not at the meeting but said later that he regretted the A.I.C.C.'s contravention of established Congress policy. He felt the Mysore resolution was ill-considered and hastily produced.⁵²

Jawaharlal told Gandhi that he had not personally approved the wording of the Mysore resolution but said it was his opinion that the Congress could protest repression in the states without contradicting its earlier resolutions. Gandhi's secretary, Mahadev Desai, replied for Gandhi, saying that the Mahatma felt the resolution was against the spirit of non-intervention.⁵³ Rajendra Prasad later amplified Desai's letter by telling Nehru the Working Committee objected to the wording of the resolution, appealing to the people of the Indian states to give "all support and encouragement to the people of Mysore in their struggle against the State for [the] right of self-determination." This, said Prasad, clearly contravened the traditional Congress policy of non-intervention.⁵⁴

It appeared that the Gandhiites wanted to maintain "diplomatic" relations with the rulers of the various states, which was consistent with

⁴⁹Congress Socialist, 17 Apr 1937.

⁵⁰Ibid., 24 Apr and 19 Jun 1937.

⁵¹Leader, 2 Nov 1937.

⁵²Harijan, 13 Nov 1937.

⁵³Nehru-Desai correspondence, 14 & 19 Nov and 2 Dec 1937, in Nehru, Bunch of Old Letters, pp.256-68.

⁵⁴Prasad to Nehru, 24 Dec 1937, ibid., pp.273-5.

Gandhi's oft-stated calls for the reform of the princely system through persuasion rather than through force. In fact, Lord Zetland was told by Political Department officers that at least two princes, those of the Central Indian states of Panna and Dewas, were in correspondence with the Working Committee to determine what their status would be under Congress rule.⁵⁵ An editorial in the Congress Socialist implied that Gandhi considered the princes to be representatives of an earlier age--an agrarian Eden to which the Mahatma wanted India to return. The high point of Congress sympathy for the repressed subjects of these princes had been reached, according to the editorial, with the 1928 Calcutta resolution. Now, said the editor, the Working Committee had abandoned even that slight gain. The remedy, as the C.S.P. saw it, was to broaden the base of the freedom struggle: "We must remove the unnatural demarcation that has been made between the fight in Indian India and the anti-imperialist struggle in British India and make the former a part of the latter."⁵⁶

In January 1938 a report on the repression of political organizations in Mysore (prepared by Pattabhi Sitaramayya, the president of the States Peoples Conference) seemed to contradict Gandhi's tacit defense of the Maharaja and re-opened the issue of Congress policy in the states.⁵⁷ On 3 February the Working Committee met to prepare its program for the Haripura Congress, which was scheduled to convene later in the month, and prepared a further clarification of its attitude towards political activity in the princely states. The committee declared that, as it had for many years, the Congress stood for freedom in the states just as in British India, but it had no way of liberating the states from its position in British India. Therefore, the states people had to develop their own institutions with which to free themselves. The Working Committee resolution continued by saying that, for the present, no Congress committee could be established in an Indian state and no internal struggle could be carried on in a state in the name of the

⁵⁵Zetland to Linlithgow, 22 Nov 1937, Linlithgow Papers, vol.4. E.M.S. Namboodripad wrote, many years later, that the Gandhiites presented the princes with a threat and an offer of assistance. According to Namboodripad, the Gandhiites were telling the princes that the British could not protect them from socialism but that the Gandhiites could and would do so if they aligned with the old guard. Namboodripad, Mahatma and the Ism, pp.75-6.

⁵⁶Congress Socialist, 18 & 25 Dec 1937. See also, A.R. Desai, Indian Feudal States and the National Liberation Struggle (Bombay, 1938).

⁵⁷P. Sitaramayya and B. Mehta, Mysore: A Study (Mapulipatam, 1938) in the Lothian Papers, vol.356.

Congress. States subjects were free to join the Congress, but the committee to which they belonged had to be outside the Indian states.⁵⁸

At a subsequent meeting of the States Peoples Conference, chaired by Sitaramayya, a resolution attacking the Congress for its neglect of states problems was narrowly defeated by a vote of 34 to 41.⁵⁹ Sitaramayya, it should be noted, was no anti-Gandhiite; he was shortly to be appointed to the Working Committee. And he was in the rather awkward position of having to defend Working Committee policy at meetings of the States Peoples Conference and, conversely, of defending the policy of his followers in the states at meetings of the Congress.

At the Subjects Committee meeting of the Haripura Congress, Sitaramayya opposed the Working Committee resolution on the states. Nehru made a long speech in defense of the resolution, saying that the Congress leaders had no lack of sympathy for the states people but were only facing the fact that the Congress had very limited means to do anything about their problems. After some debate, a committee composed of A.K. Azad, Vallabhbhai Patel, Sitaramayya, Nehru, and Subhas Bose retired to work out a compromise wording of the resolution.⁶⁰ The revised resolution was adopted in the open session of the Congress. It remained substantially unchanged except that it allowed Congress committees to be set up in the states, provided they were under the direct control of the Working Committee and that they refrained from "parliamentary activity."⁶¹

Even after the Haripura resolution, however, groups in the states found it extremely difficult to become a part of the Congress. The secretary of the States Peoples Conference complained to the Congress president that, despite the decision reached at Haripura, the Gujarat P.C.C. refused to allow the formation of state Congress committees within areas under its jurisdiction.⁶² In Cochin, a group calling itself the Cochin Congress Committee was refused entry into the Congress because the group intended to put up candidates for election to a local legislative council. J.B. Kripalani told the president of the group that the Congress could not allow any of its affiliated committees to participate in state elections of any kind.⁶³

⁵⁸ Harijan, 12 Feb 1938.

⁵⁹ Leader, 19 Feb 1938.

⁶⁰ Searchlight, 20 Feb 1938.

⁶¹ Harijan, 12 Feb 1938.

⁶² B. Mehta to Subhas Bose, 7 Apr 1938, AISPC, part 1, file 15.

⁶³ Kripalani to the Cochin Congress Committee, 19 Apr 1938, AICC file G35 (pt. 4) of 1938.

When agitation in Mysore continued, the Gandhiites took further steps to control it. In May Vallabhbhai Patel intervened, advising the Mysore Congress party to drop "Congress" from its name and to refrain from fighting under the Congress flag in Mysore. He told them that the Congress had no intention of diluting the anti-imperialist struggle by extending its influence into the states at that time.⁶⁴ Patel and J.B. Kripalani then entered into negotiations with the ruler of Mysore. They prevailed upon the Maharaja to issue a statement expressing regret for past incidents of violence and indicating his readiness to accept the cooperation of the state Congress committee in developing "constitutional reforms." On 15 May the Working Committee accepted the Maharaja's statement and congratulated Kripalani and Patel for bringing peace to Mysore.⁶⁵ The C.S.P. immediately declared that the "Mysore **settlement**" was a surrender. In effect, said M.R. Masani, the settlement denied that the princes (merely because they were not foreigners) were exploiting their subjects. This, implied Masani, was patently ridiculous.⁶⁶

In July 1938, the Working Committee reaffirmed the Haripura resolution, putting the Congress committees in the states under the direct control of the Working Committee, but the committee resolved that, for the time being, the Congress committees in the states would function under the control of their associated P.C.C.s as they had before Haripura.⁶⁷ But this was not to be taken as a license to increase the level of agitation in the princely states. In September the A.I.C.C. reiterated the Congress policy of non-interference in the states and again declared that this was not an abandonment of the states people but an admission of the limitations of the Congress. The resolution continued by declaring that, despite the statements of some Congressmen, the Congress would continue to work to convert the princes to a voluntary surrender of their powers to the people. Force was held to be inconsistent with non-violence.⁶⁸ At the same time the Gandhiites repeated their public condemnation of the 1935 Act and declared that federation could not take place except between political units "enjoying more or less the

⁶⁴Quarterly Survey . . . 31 Jul 1938, p.32, Linlithgow Papers, vol.142.

⁶⁵Harijan, 21 May 1938.

⁶⁶C.S.P. "Foreign Newsletter," 8 Jun 1938, Narayan Papers, part II, file 3.

⁶⁷IAR, 1938, vol.2, p.260.

⁶⁸Quarterly Survey . . . 31 Oct 1938, p.46, Linlithgow Papers, vol.142.

same measure of freedom and civil liberty."⁶⁹

Gandhi defended the A.I.C.C. resolution by saying that the policy of non-interference was actually intended to help create a self-reliant political capacity among the states peoples. Gandhi said that the Congress had limited resources; therefore, the states people should not set ambitious goals that relied on Congress assistance. But, said Gandhi, they should concentrate on constructive service which would give them the ability to gain limited political goals on their own.⁷⁰ Despite Gandhite efforts, however, political activity continued to increase in the states. It seems to have been fanned by radicals, including many Congress leftists from British India.

On 9 September 1938 Lord Brabourne told the Secretary of State that Congressmen from Orissa were entering the Eastern Indian States to stir up the states people into demonstrating against their rulers. Previously these states relied on police action from Bihar and Orissa to suppress such activities, but since the advent of Congress ministries in those provinces they could no longer do so.⁷¹ In November the Governor of Madras reported that his province was being used as a base for political agitators who carried out organizational work in Travancore State. There had been large public meetings and processions in Madras in support of such work, and political agitators from Madras were distributing pamphlets in Travancore. They avoided the Travancore police by using government railway lands extending into the state from which to carry out their work. Governor Erskine said that he believed Rajagopalachari would not strongly protest stern police action against these agitators, particularly if it could be seen to have been ordered by the Viceroy. Rajaji, according to Erskine, did not want to initiate such action himself.⁷² At about the same time the Governor of Bombay told the Viceroy that political activity in Rajkot in the Kathiawar States was primarily limited to states peoples, largely because of the efforts of Vallabhbhai Patel at keeping Congress agitators from entering the state from Gujarat.⁷³ Patel's involvement in the affairs of Rajkot was to increase greatly in the month of December when he entered into negotiations with the ruler of the state to try to achieve a compromise solution to political agitation then underway.

⁶⁹ Harijan, 1 Oct 1938.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Brabourne to Zetland, 9 Sep 1938, Brabourne Papers, vol.61.

⁷² Erskine to Linlithgow, 15 Nov 1938, Erskine Papers, vol.13.

⁷³ Lumley to Linlithgow, 1 Dec 1938, L/P&J/5/157.

Rajkot, in comparison to the 281 other states and estates in the Western India States Agency, was relatively wealthy and well governed. It had a history of minor political reform under the current ruler's father who had died in 1930. The Thakore Saheb, who succeeded to the throne at age twenty, ruled 75,540 subjects in his state of 282.4 square miles. He had an annual revenue of about Rs. 1,300,000 and annual expenses of about 1,100,000. Rajkot (town) was the residence of the British agent for the Western Kathiwar Agency. In addition, the Thakore Saheb was entitled to be ceremonially received by the Viceroy and had direct access to the Viceroy's political agent for states affairs. He was a member of the Chamber of Princes and was entitled to a nine-gun salute.⁷⁴ The Thakore Saheb angered a number of his subjects when he allowed his political advisors to begin to remove political reforms granted by his father, including an elected advisory council. His political troubles escalated when his state was faced with the threat of entry by political agitators from outside.

Similar events were taking place in other Indian states. In December 1938 Gandhi wrote of an "almost simultaneous awakening in the various states." Congressmen, he said, were "by natural law" the citizens of the states even when they came from outside them. Although he had been largely responsible for the long-time policy of non-interference, said Gandhi, he would not continue to defend it in the face of growing injustice: "If the Congress feel that it has the power to offer effective interference, it will be bound to do so when the call comes."⁷⁵ On 16 December 1938, the Working Committee passed a resolution welcoming the "political awakening" in the states and reserving for the Congress the right to guide the states people in their struggle and to lend them its influence. For the time being, however, Congressmen were asked not to restrict the development of self-confidence and strength in the states peoples by joining or taking part in agitation in the states. Such action, it was said, might tend to embarrass and inhibit the states peoples organizations.⁷⁶ Gandhi said that, while the moral responsibility of the struggle in the states rested in the states peoples themselves, they had the sympathy of all Congressmen and would have the help of individual Congressmen.⁷⁷

⁷⁴GoI, Memoranda on the Indian States, 1936 (Madras, 1937).

⁷⁵Harijan, 3 Dec 1938.

⁷⁶IAR, 1938, vol.2, p.299.

⁷⁷Searchlight, 15 Dec 1938.

One such individual was Vallabhbhai Patel then carrying on negotiations with the ruler of Rajkot over the formation of a committee that would recommend ways in which political reform might be carried out in the state. G.D. Birla told the Viceroy's secretary on 18 December that Gandhi and Patel wanted to prevent any untoward incidents in Rajkot but were committed to achieving some progress in the negotiations. Gandhi was also, said Birla, working to discourage Congress socialists from interfering in the agitation then under way in the Orissa states. He was helping the Viceroy in this matter and expected cooperation.⁷⁸ On December 23rd Gandhi wrote to the Viceroy, complaining that British Residents (he mentioned Rajkot) were discouraging the princes from seeking advice from Congress representatives such as Vallabhbhai Patel. Surely, said Gandhi, this could not be in the interest of the Government of India. He asked the Viceroy to tell his officers to stop the practice.⁷⁹

Within a few days of Gandhi's letter to the Viceroy, Vallabhbhai returned from Rajkot to a round of meetings in celebration of an apparent victory. The Thakore Saheb had agreed to his major demands with regard to the establishment of a committee to work out political reform in Rajkot. Congress speakers were soon expressing the wish that other states leaders would follow the example set in Rajkot and meet the legitimate demands of their subjects.⁸⁰ At the end of December, Jammala Bajaj declared that he intended to enter Jaipur in his capacity as president of the Jaipur Prajamandal in order to petition the ruler of that state to meet the legitimate demands of his subjects for political reform. A British political agent, reporting this latest move of the Gandhites, noted that Congress agitators were already involved in Jaipur when Bajaj decided to act.⁸¹ Perhaps the Gandhites were merely rushing forward so they might seem to be leading a charge that had begun without them. As much might be said of the situation in Mysore and in Rajkot where Vallabhbhai Patel had acted on behalf of the Congress in negotiations with the rulers of those states.

By the end of 1938, agitators claiming to represent the Congress were active in Baroda, Mysore, the Madras States, Jaipur, Sirahi, and

⁷⁸ Birla to Laithwaite, 18 Dec 1938, Linlithgow Papers, vol.120.

⁷⁹ Gandhi to Linlithgow, 23 Dec 1938, ibid.

⁸⁰ FR, Bombay, 2nd half of Dec 1938.

⁸¹ Political report to Governors' secretaries, 28 Jan 1939, Erskine Papers, vol.17.

Gwalior,⁸² despite Working Committee resolutions forbidding such action. Patel's activities in Rajkot, and in Mysore before that, and Bajaj's warning to the Maharaja of Jaipur can obviously be seen as an implementation of the Gandhiites' often-expressed desire to bring about the reform of the princely governments. But they can also be interpreted as an effort to control radical political activity in the states and to prevent Congress leftists and other opponents of the old guard from establishing a wide following among political dissidents in the princely states. By extracting concessions from the princes, the Gandhiites could undercut leftist demands for political agitation.

In the case of Hyderabad, where elements of the Hindu Mahasabha were working against the Nizam's government, the Congress ministry in Bombay gave routine information and assistance to the Nizam's police in dealing with agitators going from Bombay Province into the state. The ministry also agreed to provide the Hyderabad police with information on the activities of persons whom the Nizam's government thought might be planning to publish offensive political material for distribution in Hyderabad.⁸³ The Gandhiites were clearly interested in keeping political activity in the princely states at a low level. Where they could not prevent such activity they would try to lead it onto manageable ground.

Unleashed agitation in the princely states might place great pressure on the Congress ministries--either to acquiesce in the passage of repressive legislation to combat it or to resign in defense of its goals. The Gandhiites could not openly oppose political agitation in the states without seeming to oppose the aspirations of the states peoples. They could not support it without endangering their central position in the Congress. Congress leftists who opposed the long rule of the old guard would have gained a great deal in either eventuality. The possibility of the implementation of the federal section of the Government of India Act was probably a minor consideration to the Gandhiites in December 1938, at least in so far as the immediate future was concerned. But the Gandhiite policy of non-interference in the states at least kept open the possibility of some agreement whereby the Congress could gain enough princely delegates to control a future federal assembly.

In January 1939 Subhas Bose declared his candidacy for a second consecutive term as president of the Congress. He was strenuously

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Lumley to Linlithgow, 1 Jan 1939, L/P&J/5/157, and FR, Bombay, 1st half of Dec 1938.

opposed by the Gandhiites who nominated Pattabhi Sitaramayya to oppose him. The resulting election and the events which followed were to constitute a severe test of the old guard's ability to keep the Congress united and under their control. Bose attempted to create a broad-left coalition with which to modify the composition of the Congress leadership. He challenged the Gandhiites' policy towards the states and accused them of planning to force federation on a reluctant Congress. Bose's eventual defeat can be ascribed to a number of factors which included: the fissile nature of his leftist coalition, the basic conservatism of the Congress rank and file, and the immense popularity of Gandhi. One of these factors was the Gandhiites' ability to manufacture and to manage political crises and to limit the ability of their opponents to exploit them. The Rajkot satyagraha is a case in point.

Although the 1939 election of Subhas Bose and the Tripuri Congress session have been discussed by other researchers, it would perhaps be worthwhile to give some consideration to the chain of events which led to Bose's presidency and to determine the extent to which Bose threatened the Gandhiite control of the Indian National Congress.

CHAPTER VII

Subhas Bose and the Forward Bloc, January to August 1939.

For a short time in the spring and summer of 1939 Subhas Bose was able to rally a diverse collection of forces in the Indian National Congress and to challenge Gandhiite control of that organization. Bose expressed hopes of forming a leftist coalition which would better represent Indian nationalism and more firmly resist British imperialism than the followers of the Mahatma had done. He implied that his opponents were preparing to accept a federal constitution under the Government of India Act of 1935, and he called on all who opposed such a scheme to join him in forcing the removal of the Act, with violence if necessary. Bose's success was shortlived, his political footing outside his native Bengal, unsure. Bose's defeat represented an end to a particular phase of the struggle for control of the Congress. The Congress socialists had evidently missed their last, best opportunity to depose the Gandhiite leaders of the Congress.

Subhas Chandra Bose was an avowed follower of the Bengali nationalist C.R. Das, and on Das's death in 1925, Bose seemed the most likely heir to the former's political mantle. Both men represented a rising class of urban Hindus with political influence in Dacca and in Calcutta and with seemingly little power in the largely-Muslim rural sections of Bengal. Bose was a radical nationalist not untinged by the tradition of terrorist violence in Bengal politics.¹ He had a penchant for parades and military uniforms which displeased the Gandhiites. His one-time secretary, Nirad C. Chaudhuri, described a uniformed corps that Bose formed for the 1928 session of the Indian National Congress in Calcutta: "Mahatma Gandhi, being a sincere pacifist vowed to non-violence, did not like the strutting, clicking of boots, and saluting, and he afterwards described the Calcutta session of the Congress as a Bertram Mills circus, which caused a great deal of indignation among

¹The Joint Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform concluded in 1934 that terrorism, as a political tool in India, could "almost invariably be traced to Bengali influences." Extracts from vol. 2 of the record of the committee, Templewood Papers, vol. 77. A later study by the Government of India described 636 terrorist incidents that occurred in India between 1917 and 1936. Of these, 384 (60.4%) occurred in Bengal. GoI, Intelligence Bureau, Terrorism in India, 1917-1936 (Simla, 1937).

the Bengalis."²

Bose seemed to admire men who had achieved power by violent means. In an address delivered in August 1938, Bose said that the most successful of Europe's postwar leaders were comparatively-young, vigorous, but inexperienced administrators who had asserted themselves forcefully: "One has only to look at successful administrators like Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini and Kemal Pasha [Mustapha Kemal] to appreciate the force of my argument."³ Bose particularly admired Kemal, perhaps because of his military successes against the British. On Kemal's death in November 1938, Bose called him "one of the greatest men of this century": "Should the European Powers try once again to overrun Asia, Kemal's Turkey will guard the western flank of our continent."⁴

Bose's differences with the Gandhiites were evident in 1928 when, along with his volunteer corps, the Bengali leader tried to organize resistance to Gandhi's compromise resolution giving a one-year lease on life to the Nehru report.⁵ Bose reportedly tried to influence the Bengali delegation to vote against the resolution as a block, but there were many abstentions and 200 voted for Gandhi's resolution while about 400 Bengalis voted with Bose.⁶ If Bose had controlled all of the Bengal delegation he might have defeated the measure, it was passed by a vote of 1350 to 973.⁷ Subhas was involved in a struggle to gain power in the Bengal Congress--a struggle which had been underway since the death of C.R. Das. He resented what he felt was undue interference in Bengal affairs by the Gandhiites. In December 1929, in what was to be a recurring event, two delegations from Bengal showed up at the A.I.C.C. meeting preceding the Lahore Congress; each claimed to have won the recent Congress elections. One faction was led by Bose, the other by J.M. Sen-Gupta. The Congress president, Motilal Nehru, appointed Pattabhi Sitaramayya to collect evidence in the dispute. Bose objected to the procedure and resigned from the Congress Working Committee.⁸

²N. Chaudhuri, The Continent of Circe (London, 1965), p.109.

³S. Bose, Crossroads (London, 1962), p.58. ⁴Ibid., p.79.

⁵See Chapter 2, p.48, above.

⁶Hindu, 1 Jan 1929.

⁷Leader, 2 Jan 1929.

⁸Hindu, 28 Dec 1929. Bose had resigned from the Working Committee a few weeks earlier, claiming that he was not allowed to speak his mind on differences of opinion with the other members. He was persuaded to retract his resignation. Hindu, 22 Nov 1929.

The prize under contention was not so much the Bengal delegation at the Lahore Congress as the control of the Bengal P.C.C. at the time of the Calcutta municipal elections scheduled for April. The Gandhites did not try to impose any solution on the Bengalis before the Congress session but allowed the previous A.I.C.C. delegation from Bengal to function until January 1930.⁹ The subsequent preparations for civil disobedience made a further decision a matter of little immediate concern to the Working Committee.

But the fight over the mayoralty of Calcutta continued. British observers noted that whoever controlled the Congress P.C.C. in Bengal could nominate the Congress candidates for city offices in Calcutta. Although both Sen-Gupta and Bose were arrested on C.D. charges before the election, the political fight continued to be carried out by their lieutenants, and Gandhi's call for civil disobedience was ignored by the majority of the Bengal Congress until the municipal elections were over. A compromise was reached in April which allowed Sen-Gupta to be re-elected mayor. The vice-mayor, a Bose man, was allowed to assume the office until Sen-Gupta was released from jail at the end of his six-month sentence.¹⁰

The next Congress session (Karachi, April 1931) also saw the Bengal Congress embroiled in a factional dispute. Bose had been excluded from the Working Committee over what Gandhi described as the differences which remained between him and the Bengali leader. Gandhi said he was exchanging ideas with Bose and hoped to be able to quickly resolve the problems which divided the Bengal P.C.C.¹¹ One of Gandhi's "constructive workers," Krishna Das, was in Calcutta, discussing with Bose the terms on which the latter would support Gandhi's proposed truce with the Viceroy (the Gandhi-Irwin pact). After giving Gandhi an outline of the terms (they had largely to do with concessions demanded by Bose's revolutionary or terrorist supporters), Das explained the political situation in Bengal as he understood it.

According to Das, the Sen-Gupta and Bose factions of the Congress were deeply divided. Bose, he said, had been honorable in coming half way to meet Gandhite efforts at a negotiated settlement but Sen-Gupta, who was in a weaker position, had not. Das said that Sen-Gupta's party

⁹IAR, 1929, vol.2, p.269.

¹⁰FR, Bengal, Feb and Apr 1930.

¹¹Bombay Chronicle, 2 Apr 1931.

consisted of revolutionary groups, communists, and "khaddar workers." The last named, dedicated Gandhiites, were well disciplined, said Das, but in a distinct minority. Bose's group consisted of a rival set of revolutionaries, more radical than Sen-Gupta's supporters, and also contained a number of men who had formerly been with Sen-Gupta but had gravitated to the currently-successful Bose, said Das. Das judged Bose's group to be the more disciplined of the two. The internal rivalries of Sen-Gupta's faction might, said Das, come to the fore again if they managed to sieze control of the Bengal P.C.C. from the Bose group.¹²

In June the Gandhiites appointed M.S. Aney as sole arbitrator of Congress election disputes. He would investigate charges made by Sen-Gupta that the Bose faction had stolen the Bengal Congress elections. A spokesman for the Bengal government commented that neither of the two factions in the province seemed likely to accept Aney's decision if it went against them and noted that each of the two Congress factions in Dacca was holding its own separate election.¹³ The Gandhiites were reported to be angry at Sen-Gupta for neglecting a September A.I.C.C. meeting in order to devote time to the Calcutta municipal election.¹⁴ Vallabhbhai Patel also criticised Sen-Gupta for defying the control of the Bengal P.C.C. Patel assured Sen-Gupta that the Working Committee was investigating charges of corruption he had brought against his political opponents. But, said Patel, until and unless the charges were proven, the Bose group had to be respectfully treated since they controlled the Bengal Congress executive. Open defiance by Sen-Gupta was an embarrassment to his friends on the Working Committee.¹⁵

Meanwhile Bose complained to the Working Committee, through Aney, that by standing for election to Calcutta office against the orders of the P.C.C. Sen-Gupta had breached Congress discipline and should be punished.¹⁶ B.C. Roy, an ally of the Gandhiites in Bengal, had earlier suggested that it might be wise for the Working Committee to prevent all Congressmen from holding office in Calcutta. Patel agreed with Roy

¹²Intercepted letter, Das to Gandhi, 9 Feb 1931, Home Pol. file 39/15 of 1935.

¹³FR, Bengal, 1st half of Jun 1931.

¹⁴Ibid., Bombay, 1st half of Sep 1931.

¹⁵Patel to Sen Gupta, 11 Sep 1931, AICC file P15 of 1931.

¹⁶Bose to Aney, 17 Sep 1931, ibid.

that the city's municipal offices were behind most of the trouble in Bengal but didn't feel a blanket proscription of offices by the Working Committee could be enforced.¹⁷

Aney's report, submitted at the end of September, resulted in the temporary overthrow of Bose's group and in the installation of Sen-Gupta's in the Bengal P.C.C.¹⁸ The decision was described as a compromise by Congress spokesmen--Bose resigned and arrangements were made for both factions to be represented on the P.C.C. But British observers said the settlement was unquestionably a defeat for Bose and predicted it would not last.¹⁹

In the following months as the resumption of civil disobedience seemed imminent, Bose and the Gandhiites became involved in a dispute as to who would lead the various Congress youth groups into the struggle. Bose refused to attend the October meeting of the Working Committee (he had been invited as an observer), saying that the Congress leaders were ignoring the problems of Bengal. Vallabhbhai Patel, the Congress president, denied the charge, claiming that in fact he had intended to hold the meeting in Calcutta but had been prevented from so doing because of the inconvenience it would have caused other members.²⁰

The meeting had been re-scheduled a number of times to suit the conflicting interests of different members and was finally fixed for 27 October. It was most convenient to hold it in the Delhi area because the Muslim members would be attending a national Muslim conference in neighboring Punjab on the 24th of the month.²¹ Vallabhbhai said he didn't think it really mattered when or where they held the meeting, that Bose would find some pretext for complaint and would refuse to attend. He was, said Patel, only interested in making a scene and in seeing that it came to the notice of the press.²²

In November 1931 Bose was touring Bengal in an attempt to stimulate activity among Congress youth groups when Jawaharlal Nehru visited the province on a similar errand. Nehru, according to the British, supported Bose's rival for chairmanship of a special provincial conference and Bose resented the interference. On 24 November Bose spoke

¹⁷Patel to Roy, 12 Sep 1931, ibid.

¹⁸Report of 25 Sep 1931, AICC file G120 (part I) of 1931. See also J. Gallagher, "Congress in Decline," p.290.

¹⁹FR, Bengal, 2nd half of Sep 1931.

²⁰Leader, 21 Oct 1931.

²¹Patel to J. Nehru, 15 Oct 1931, AICC file 52 of 1931.

²²Patel to M.A. Ansari, 21 Oct 1931, ibid.

of the intrusion of prominent personalities from outside who had no sympathy for Bengal's problems.²³ In December Bose accepted an invitation to address a youth conference in Gujarat, only to find that the conference had been cancelled at the last moment by Vallabhbhai Patel. Patel said that the conference had been cancelled on the grounds that with Gandhi returning empty-handed from the Round Table Conference, all efforts would have to be concentrated on the likely resumption of civil disobedience. But Patel confided to his subordinates that the real reason for his cancelling the youth conference was that he did not like the leftist slant of its members and he did not want Bose to preside over it.²⁴ Also in December, the conflict in Bengal between the Bose and Sen-Gupta factions was resumed. In December 1931 the Bengal government reported that Bose's men seemed to have ousted the president of the P.C.C. and were again in a good position to control Calcutta corporation funds.²⁵

Bose was included among the first wave of Congress workers to be arrested at the resumption of the civil disobedience movement in January 1932. At that time Bose, Vitalbhai Patel (Vallabhbhai's older brother), and Jamnadas Mehta, the then president of the T.U.C., published a joint letter condemning the Congress Working Committee, implying that the Gandhiites were preparing to enter into another pact with the Viceroy and to settle for something less than complete independence for India. The three announced the formation of a new party within the Congress to be called the Independence Party.²⁶ In November, one of Bose's fellow prisoners, S. Mukunda Lall, said that Bose was planning to form a new left-wing party which, unlike the C.P.I., would be free of doctrinaire leadership from Moscow. Bose, said Lall, was convinced that British repression would awaken India and had already revealed the inadequacy of Gandhi's program.²⁷ But while Bose was preaching revolution from his jail cell, his lieutenants in the Bengal Congress were deeply involved in the upcoming Calcutta corporation elections.

²³FR, Bengal, 2nd half of Nov 1931, Nehru said that he had chided both Congress factions in Bengal for allowing their province to become the scene of political dissention and inter se fighting. He told Vallabhbhai Patel that both groups had resented his statements and that Sen-Gupta's supporters had joined in the attack on him. Nehru to Patel, 26 Nov 1931, AICC file G60 of 1931.

²⁴Morarji Desai, The Story of my Life (Delhi, 1974), vol.1, pp.96-97. The Gujarat youth conference later became the nucleus of the Gujarat Congress Socialist Party. See Desai, p.116.

²⁵FR, Bengal, 1st half of Dec 1931.

²⁶Leader, 4 Jan 1932.

²⁷Mahratta, 6 Nov 1932.

They were, apparently, defying Working Committee directives to take part in the Calcutta Congress of 15 March 1933.²⁸

Bose had not been healthy during his stay in prison and in February 1933 his condition became serious enough for his captors to allow his release on condition that he go to Europe for treatment. Vitalbhai Patel was then in Vienna being treated for a heart condition, and, for a time, Bose and Patel shared the facilities of the same clinics. When Gandhi began his fast and temporary suspension of civil disobedience in May 1933, Bose and Patel sent a joint letter of condemnation from Europe. India needed a radical program and a new leader who could implement it, they said; it was unfair to expect Gandhi to continue to lead a movement he had obviously lost faith in.²⁹

By the summer of 1933 Bose was fit enough to travel. In June he chaired the 3rd Indian Political Conference in London. He told his listeners that the past leadership of the Congress had not been militant enough. Efforts at a compromise with the British had been a mistake, he said; the Gandhi-Irwin pact had been a blunder, the surrender of May 1933, a calamity. There was no possibility of a compromise between true Indian nationalists and their British oppressors, he said, because there was no community of interest on which to build such a compromise.³⁰ Bose reiterated these sentiments in a letter to the London Times on 14 June. He said that he and other radical Congress leaders had entered into an agreement with the Gandhiites at Karachi (March 1931)--they would support the Gandhi-Irwin pact so long as the Mahatma continued to actively resist British oppression. The suspension of C.D. in May and the diverting of the independence struggle into a campaign against untouchability were, he thought, "a gross betrayal on the part of our leader." That, said Bose, was why he and Patel had written their letter criticising Gandhi.³¹

Bose continued to snipe at the Gandhiites from his enforced exile, and he also tried to keep his hand in Bengal politics through the agency of his older brother, Sarat and other representatives. Bengal Congress leaders, who were for the most part urban Hindus, seemed to feel that their problems were neglected by the Gandhiites. This complaint was often made by Bose, but it was apparently felt by his opponents in the Bengal Congress as well. On 3 July 1933 the Associated Press reported that, although the Congress leaders conference in Poona was scheduled for the

²⁸FR, Bengal, 1st half of Mar 1933.

²⁹Searchlight, 12 May 1933.

³⁰Hindustan Times, 13 Jun 1933.

³¹Ibid., 6 Jul 1933.

12th, no Bengalis had been included in the 200-odd invitations sent out by M.S. Aney.³² The Gandhiites denied this. Bose obviously could not attend; J.M. Sen-Gupta was in jail; and Mrs. Sen-Gupta had been invited but was unable to attend, according to a spokesman for the Congress leaders.³³ The British reported that Gandhi's arrest in August 1933 aroused little evidence of sympathy among Bengal Congressmen; they felt that Gandhi had betrayed their interests to the Muslims and depressed classes.³⁴

J.M. Sen-Gupta died of a stroke in July 1933. In the resulting reshuffling of forces in Bengal, Dr. B.C. Roy managed to gain control of what had been the Sen-Gupta faction. Roy's first major test of strength against the Bose faction came in the elections of new Congress officers at the end of the C.D. movement. As before, the Bengal factions could not agree on the ground rules for the election, and, in the summer of 1934, M.S. Aney was again appointed by the Working Committee to oversee the contest. Roy's group won about 60 percent of the seats on the P.C.C., but many of the results were challenged by Bose's supporters. Roy was elected president of the P.C.C. on 11 October and he immediately appointed an executive committee composed entirely of his own followers.³⁵

When the Bengal P.C.C. was reorganized under the rules of the 1934 (Bombay) constitution, the Working Committee awarded 60 of the 100 allotted seats to the Roy faction. As an attempt at compromise, Bose was named president of the committee in absentia. The Bose faction demanded parity on the P.C.C. Despite efforts at arbitration by the Gandhiites, the struggle for control of the Bengal Congress broke out afresh, and the Bose faction eventually came to the fore again.³⁶

Gandhi had traveled to Bengal in July 1934, ostensibly to collect funds for his constructive program, but also to try to arrange an amicable settlement and to avoid the necessity of intervention by the Working Committee. British observers said he collected approximately Rs. 75,000 but seemed to have had absolutely no success in the second part of his mission.³⁷ The results of Working Committee arbitration, and Roy's initial successes, might indicate that the Gandhiites leaned towards helping Roy at Bose's expense. Bose's supporters certainly thought so.³⁸ But it is probably fair to say that the Gandhiites would

³² Leader, 5 Jul 1933.

³³ Ibid., 13 Jul 1933.

³⁴ FR, Bengal, 1st half of Aug 1933.

³⁵ Ibid., 1st half of Nov 1934.

³⁶ This account is based on the file headed "Bengal Election Dispute," Prasad Papers, IV/36, collection 1. See also AICC file G25 of 1934-36.

³⁷ FR, Bengal, 2nd half of July 1934.

³⁸ See, for instance, K.S. Roy to J. Nehru, 28 Mar 1936, Prasad Papers, IV/36.

have accepted any settlement that would have ended the fighting and strengthened the Congress.

The Gandhites on the Working Committee had proposed that, as a compensation for the Roy group giving up the presidency of the Bengal P.C.C., either Profulla Ghosh, a sometime ally of Roy and a follower of Gandhi, or B.C. Roy himself be put on the Working Committee. Gandhi wanted A.K. Azad to be the only Bengali on the committee. He said as much to Roy. Gandhi told Roy that when Rajendra Prasad approached him on the matter he, Gandhi, temporarily forgot his vow of non-interference in Congress politics. He told Prasad that if the committee decided it needed either Ghosh or Roy, he preferred Roy but would rather have only Azad. The Mahatma, after disclosing this, assured Roy that he did not intend to abandon Roy's interest and was grateful for Roy's help in the past. He concluded with a request that Roy go along with the Working Committee's plans for a compromise between the two factions in the Bengal Congress:³⁹

The fact is that, so far as I am concerned, we have been coming closer day by day. The association with you in Calcutta during my recent visit [July 1934] brought you closer to me. Your help during the strenuous time last week [during the Bombay Congress] I appreciate very deeply, and I have not hesitate to say so to many friends. Whatever decision you take, I shall be fully satisfied if this letter does not interfere with the growth of that co-operation. I am desperately anxious for Bengal to have a homogeneous, closely-knit Congress Party without internal divisions.

Roy was not happy at the prospect of the continued lack of representation on the Working Committee of the Hindu element in the Bengal Congress. The Muslim A.K. Azad was not a satisfactory substitute. Roy told Prasad, at the end of October, that the failure to appoint a Bengal man to the committee had convinced Roy's supporters that they were no longer in the Gandhites' good graces. As a result, said Roy, the funds at his disposal to do Congress work had practically dried up.⁴⁰ What was hurting Roy more acutely was the fact that he had no funds with which to support the Swarajya Party campaign for offices in the Central Legislative Assembly. He had agreed to raise Rs. 5000 to help party candidates in the U.P. but had to tell the party leader, M.A. Ansari, that he could not keep his promise.⁴¹ Roy said he felt he was either being dumped by the Gandhites or being subjected to a rigorous test of

³⁹ Gandhi to Roy, 30 Oct 1934, CWMG, vol.59, pp.267-9.

⁴⁰ Roy to Prasad, 31 Oct 1934, AICC file G30 of 1934.

⁴¹ Roy to Ansari, 1 Nov 1934, Ansari Papers, no.268.

his loyalty.⁴²

In mid-December 1934 Prasad told Roy that, rightly or wrongly, he hadn't appointed a Bengali to the Working Committee after the Bombay Congress (October 1934). The situation was now complicated by Roy's group losing control of the Bengal P.C.C. and by the poor showing of Congress candidates in the recent C.L.A. elections. Prasad said he was not trying to stall Roy in hopes he would eventually lose the battle in Bengal and be off his hands. He assured Roy of his friendship and of the support of the Working Committee who greatly appreciated Roy's work in their behalf. But, said Prasad, until there was some amicable settlement of the factional dispute in Bengal, he could not afford to anger Bose by putting Roy on the Working Committee.⁴³

The Gandhiites failed to bring about a settlement of the Bengal dispute, but they did manage to bring the opposing Bengal factions together on one issue. Both the Bose and the Roy groups were agreed in their rejection of the Working Committee's neutral stand on the communal award which made it nearly impossible for any Hindu group to dominate a future legislative assembly in Bengal. In January 1935, Bose wrote to Rajendra Prasad:⁴⁴

The Report of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Indian Constitutional Reforms, the Communal Decision (wrongly called "award") of the Prime Minister and the incarceration without trial of over 2000 workers represent the wrong which the Province is suffering at the hands of the Government. The refusal to condemn the Communal Decision and the deliberate exclusion of Bengal's representative from the Working Committee represent the wrong which the Province is suffering at the hands of Congress leaders. It is imperative that the Province should take immediate steps to fight both these wrongs simultaneously.

In March Prasad noted that both factions in the Bengal Congress seemed to mistrust the Working Committee. At a time when the Communal Award was arousing great passion in Bengal, Gandhi's efforts to promote the newly-formed All-India Village Industries Association were attacked by Bengal Hindus as an effort to undermine their support in the countryside. Prasad found it necessary to convene a meeting of Bengal Congress

⁴²Roy to Prasad, 8 Dec 1934, AICC file G30 of 1933-6.

⁴³Prasad to Roy, 13 Dec 1934, *ibid.* Prasad told Jayaprakash that he wanted to appoint Ghosh, who had since been made a director of the A.I.V.I.A., but said that would have angered both Roy and Bose. Prasad to Narayan, 25 Feb 1935, Prasad Papers, file III of 1935.

⁴⁴Bose to Prasad, n.d. Jan 1935, Prasad Papers, IV/36.

leaders in order to assure them that it was not Gandhi's intention to use the A.I.V.I.A. as a tool to maintain his power in the Congress.⁴⁵ At one point the Bengal P.C.C. (then controlled by the Bose faction) went so far as to attempt to establish its own village uplift association.⁴⁶ Working Committee relations with the Bengal Congress deteriorated further during the year and in October the Gandhiites found it necessary to threaten the P.C.C. executive committee with disciplinary action in order to get it to comply with Working Committee directives.⁴⁷

Bose had often maintained that he represented a socialist or leftist constituency in Bengal, in fact, throughout India. And, like a number of other anti-Gandhiites, he claimed that he was opposed by the Gandhiites because of his leftist beliefs. In December 1935 Bose wrote to Rajendra Prasad praising the latter's record of relations with leftist and labour leaders. He said he agreed with many of Prasad's expressed views. If he had been in India during Prasad's presidency, said Bose, the two of them would have been able to work closely together. The other Congress leaders, said Bose, were making a mistake in preventing a consolidation of the various leftist groups under a broad front that would vigorously pursue the fight for independence. Bose suggested that the Gandhiites follow the example of De Valera who had, according to Bose, welcomed Irish socialists into his party. But, he concluded, Gandhi was blind to such arguments: "If my words had the slightest influence with Mahatmaji, I would have written to him."⁴⁸

Bose's claim to be a dedicated socialist and the leader of the socialists in Bengal was questioned by the Governor, Sir John Anderson, in December 1936. Anderson said that the Bengal Congress had a long history of internal faction, that both Bose and Roy represented a Hindu elite that seemed to be losing its position of dominance in Bengal. One faction, the Bose group, tended to look to political upheaval to bring them to the fore again; the other, he thought, was more willing to try constitutional methods. Anderson said that differences between the two groups were largely on the basis of personalities, not issues, and that alignments within the groups could change as individuals switched their loyalty from one to the other for political advantage. He

⁴⁵Notes on informal talks between R. Prasad and "Bengal Friends," 19 & 20 Mar 1935, ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Report on Working Committee meeting, 15-16 Oct 1935, ibid.

⁴⁸Bose to Prasad, 19 Dec 1935, ibid., file VII of 1936.

noted that J.C. Gupta, who had been a leading figure in the Sen-Gupta faction, now supported Bose. All Congress leaders in Bengal, said Anderson, relied heavily on what he called the "gangster element." With "gangsters' revolvers" at their backs and the threat of a Muslim majority in front, neither Congress faction in Bengal had much room for maneuver, according to the Governor.⁴⁹

Anderson's analysis has a great deal of substance, particularly if one substitutes "revolutionary" or "terrorist" for "gangster." The words were synonymous to a number of British administrators. Both Bose and Roy would have claimed to be spiritual followers of C.R. Das but would have had different opinions as to what that meant in ideological terms. Of the two, Roy certainly had closer personal and political connections with the Gandhites. He was at times Gandhi's personal physician. He had even closer connections with Congress right-wingers, and was a key figure in the revival of the Congress-Swarajya Party.⁵⁰ Bose, on the other hand, had a closer connection with elements dedicated to political violence but, like his opponents, gave evidence of a willingness to work with any group that would help his cause.⁵¹

Bose himself told Jawaharlal Nehru in 1937 that, perhaps, the fighting between the Bengal Congress factions was a result more of habit than of ideological differences. He said that if the Working Committee would back him he could bring peace to the Bengal Congress: "You know all about the quarrels in Bengal in recent years. Their roots have gone deep. The differences centre around personalities and it is difficult to discover any principle under-lying them."⁵²

Bengali Congressmen were sensitive to what they felt were slights at the hands of the Working Committee. Bengal had, they felt, been the focus of the independence movement before Gandhi's rise to power, and now, they felt, Gandhi's followers were ignoring their problems and downgrading their efforts. When Pattabhi Sitaramayya's history of the Congress was published, the Bengalis accused the Working Committee of attempting to re-write the history of the freedom movement to suit their purposes. Sitaramayya had, they said, misrepresented Bengal in

⁴⁹Anderson to Linlithgow, 3 Dec 1936, Linlithgow Papers, vol. 112.

⁵⁰See Roy's correspondence with Bhulabhai Desai, M.A. Ansari, S. Satyamurti, K.M. Munshi, et al., Jul 1934 to Jan 1935, B.C. Roy Papers.

⁵¹See the biographical note on Subhas Bose, 24 Nov 1936, L/P&J file 174/2 of 1935.

⁵²Bose to Nehru, 11 Apr 1937, AICC file P5 of 1937.

general and C.R. Das in particular. Prasad looked into the matter and decided that the specific complaints lodged by the Bengal P.C.C. could not be met without a new edition of the official Congress history. He asked Sitaramayya to try to do something to satisfy the Bengalis, but he implied that it would be a difficult task.⁵³

Of more importance, perhaps, were the continuing differences between the Gandhiites and the Bengali Congressmen on the proper approach to communal problems. In the run-up to the 1937 legislative elections, the Congress president, Jawaharlal Nehru, criticised the Bengal Congress for playing communal politics. Nehru said that the militant-Hindu Nationalist Party had effectively taken control of the Bengal Congress. Sarat Bose protested that this was not true. He wrote to Nehru in October 1936, expressing his surprise that Nehru would take a one-sided view of the situation. He said he had expected the old guard, including Vallabhbhai Patel and Rajendra Prasad, to attack them but had hoped that Nehru would show some understanding: "The fact is that the Nationalist Party in Bengal has become merged into the Congress and not that the Nationalist Party has swallowed the Congress in Bengal." The Bengal Congress, he said, had no choice but to reject the communal award.⁵⁴

Congress candidates from both Bengal factions opposed the Working Committee's neutral position on the Communal Award. Vallabhbhai Patel twice wrote to B.C. Roy, warning him that unless Congress candidates accepted the Working Committee decision and signed a satisfactory pledge on the matter, they would be disqualified from the Congress ticket.⁵⁵

Subhas Bose had criticised what he called Gandhi's willingness to compromise with British imperialism. Both he and his brother Sarat had spoken against the possibility of the Congress accepting office under the Government of India Act. But when the Congress prepared to accept office in the Congress-majority provinces, Sarat Bose asked that minority provinces (such as Bengal) be included as possible areas for Congress-coalition governments. The resulting wording of the Congress resolution to accept office, passed on 7 July 1937, seemed to meet this request.⁵⁶ The only way the Congress could hope to form a ministry in

⁵³Prasad to Sitaramayya, 8 Jul 1936, Prasad Papers file III of 1936. Other materials in this file indicate that the Maharashtrians, too, felt that their hero, B.G. Tilak, had been slighted by Sitaramayya.

⁵⁴Sarat Bose to Nehru, 9 Oct 1936, *ibid*.

⁵⁵Patel to Roy, 9 & 14 Oct 1936, B.C. Roy Papers, part II.

⁵⁶See Chapter 4, pp.122-23, above.

Bengal was as part of a coalition. Both Congress factions in Bengal pursued efforts to form a coalition government during the period of Congress rule. At times each was discouraged from so doing by the Gandhiites.

In order to form a Congress coalition the Bengal Congress had first to bring down the existing coalition led by A.K. Fazl ul Huq. Even before 7 July the Bengal Congress attacked the provincial government on its proposals for agrarian reform. Governor Anderson noted in June 1937 that the major drawback to this scheme, as far as the Bengal Congress was concerned, was that it had for many years supported and been identified with landlord interests. Anderson said that not only did the Congress call for a more radical agrarian program tend to alienate its conservative supporters, it also carried little weight with the Muslim agriculturalists it was supposed to woo.⁵⁷ The Huq ministry was aware of its opponents' weakness. At one point, in October 1937, the Huq government challenged the Congress on the issue by holding a division of the assembly on their tenancy reform bill which the Congress had been attacking. The Congress members could not vote against it without angering their conservative supporters, and they could hardly vote for it after having made such a show of opposing it. They abstained.⁵⁸ Sarat Bose denied that the Bengal Congress was aligned with vested interests on the issue, claiming that they couldn't have defeated the bill in any case. The bill won by a vote of 110 to 27, and, according to Sarat, the Congress could not have mustered more than 50 additional opposition votes.⁵⁹

A second issue on which the Bengal Congress attacked the ministry was that of political prisoners. Gandhi visited Bengal in November 1937 in part to aid a Working Committee campaign to free all political prisoners. Governor Anderson reported that both Congress factions in Bengal seemed to be trying to gain favor in Gandhi's eyes in order to get his help in overthrowing the Huq ministry.⁶⁰ He said that Gandhi had criticised the radicals in the Bengal Congress at an A.I.C.C. meeting in Calcutta and chose to stay with Bose's rivals during his visit. However, said Anderson,

⁵⁷Anderson to Linlithgow, 23 Jun 1937, Linlithgow Papers, vol.113.

⁵⁸Anderson to Linlithgow, 6 Oct 1937, ibid.

⁵⁹Sarat Bose to J. Nehru, 10 Oct 1937, AICC file P5 of 1937.

⁶⁰Anderson to Linlithgow, 5 Nov 1937, Linlithgow Papers, vol.113.

Gandhi seemed to ignore pleas from both sides to help them bring down the Huq ministry. Anderson said that he believed Gandhi could have forced the ministry out of office over the prisoners issue if he had wanted to.⁶¹

When Subhas Bose returned from his latest European visit to assume the presidency of the Congress, he continued efforts to form a Congress-coalition government in Bengal. In March 1938 Governor Brabourne, who had just taken over from Anderson, wrote that the Bose group was making overtures to left-wing Muslims in the Bengal ministry while conservative Muslims in the ministry, led by the finance minister, N.R. Sarkar, were exploring the possibility of forming a coalition with the B.C. Roy group.⁶² But Bose and B.C. Roy were not the only political leaders conniving to form a new Bengal ministry. In August 1938 M.N. Roy asked one of his allies in Bengal to look into the possibility of getting Huq to lead a new leftist government.⁶³ Roy said Bose was more interested in leading "mindless" attacks on the Huq ministry than in trying to defeat the reactionary politicians in the Bengal Congress.⁶⁴

A significant number of Bose's supporters were drawn from the ranks of political prisoners. Bose exerted great effort to establish released prisoners and detenus in prominent positions in the Congress. In May the Government of Bengal reported that Bose had managed to place recently-released prisoners in control of the Midnapur district committee and was increasing his efforts to do so in other districts.⁶⁵ In June Lord Brabourne told the Viceroy that Bose had resumed his attack on the Huq ministry and had secured the support of the Bengal kisan sabha, various communists, released detenus, and the Independent Proja Party. The attack was supported by a number of the better-off peasants, said Brabourne, but the poorer peasants were disinclined to join political demonstrations of any kind.⁶⁶

Bose's efforts to radicalize the Bengal Congress resulted in considerable increases in the number of released prisoners and detenus in the Bengal Congress committees. In early January 1939, the Times of India estimated that approximately 3000 detenus and ordinary prisoners

⁶¹ Anderson to Linlithgow, 21 Nov 1937, L/P&J/5/141.

⁶² Brabourne to Linlithgow, 20 Mar 1937, ibid., vol. 142.

⁶³ M.N. Roy to S.R. Das, 4 Aug 1938, M.N. Roy Papers, LCR-Bengal.

⁶⁴ M.N. Roy to "Bengal Friends," 18 Aug 1938, ibid.

⁶⁵ FR, Bengal, 2nd half of May 1938.

⁶⁶ Brabourne to Linlithgow, 17 Jun 1938, Linlithgow Papers, vol. 37.

had been released by the Huq ministry since March 1937 and that most of those who went into the Congress belonged to the radical (Bose) group.⁶⁷ Of the 544 Bengal delegates to the Tripuri Congress 94 were ex-detenus or recently-released state prisoners,⁶⁸ most of whom presumably owed their allegiance to Subhas Bose.

In late 1938 Bose became convinced that the time was ripe for another attempt to form a Congress coalition government. He traveled to Wardha to put his case before Gandhi. Gandhi considered his advice and discussed the situation with G.D. Birla and N.R. Sarkar. He then wrote a letter to Bose in Birla's and Sarkar's presence, telling Subhas that he could not help him at that time. Sarkar showed Lord Brabourne a copy of the letter and said that he had been given permission to do so by Vallabhbhai Patel. Brabourne memorized one of Gandhi's sentences: "I am more than ever convinced that we should not aim at ousting the present ministry. To do so would do more harm than good to the Congress."⁶⁹

Bose was said to be extremely angry.⁷⁰ On December 21st, after receiving Gandhi's refusal, he criticised Gandhi for listening to the advice of Congress conservatives such as A.K. Azad and G.D. Birla. Gandhi, he said, was ignoring the best interests of the Congress and was getting bad advice from his conservative allies. Azad, Bose said, was tacitly supporting the Huq ministry in order to prevent the installation of a leftist ministry in Bengal. A week earlier Sarkar had, according to Bose, agreed to resign and force the collapse of the Huq government. Bose asked Gandhi what he had done to change Sarkar's mind so suddenly.⁷¹

Bose felt that there was a possibility of forming coalition governments in the Congress minority provinces of Sind, Bengal and Punjab. If the Working Committee were willing to make the necessary compromises with other minority parties, the Congress could, argued Bose, control eleven provincial governments in India. It would then be in a position (especially if a war broke out in Europe) to force the British to make substantial concession. Even without a confrontation with the

⁶⁷Times of India, 10 Jan 1939.

⁶⁸Brabourne to Linlithgow, 5 Feb 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.38.

⁶⁹Brabourne to Linlithgow, 23 Dec 1938, ibid.

⁷⁰Brabourne to Linlithgow, 19 Dec 1938, ibid.

⁷¹Bose to Gandhi, 21 Dec 1938, J. Nehru Papers, part I, vol.9.

British, said Bose, Congress coalitions in the minority provinces would give the Congress the opportunity to satisfy Muslim grievances and thus to undermine the position of the Muslim League.⁷²

In addition to Gandhi, Rajendra Prasad opposed such coalition governments. He told Vallabhbhai Patel that Congress parties in the minority provinces should set a public example of morality and rectitude. They should consistently put forth an honest reform program and should seek elections on the program. To do otherwise, to try to topple the existing ministries by intrigue, to make questionable deals with questionable politicians would, said Prasad, only serve to bring the Congress into disrepute. Prasad maintained that the Congress coalition in Assam, which he and Azad had opposed and which Patel and Bose had supported, had shown the local Congress party to be as narrowly interested in power for its own sake as was the previous ministry.⁷³

Patel told Prasad that he was being naive. He agreed that Congress should have no part of any "doubtful" or dishonest deals. But, as far as "doubtful" allies were concerned, Patel said that in politics there were no other kind. With a communal electorate, said Patel, a hands-off policy by the Congress would impress no one. If they stood aside while potential allies cried for help, they would only embitter their friends and give comfort to their enemies. He asked Prasad to look at the situation realistically: "I see your point of view fully, but the present state of things if allowed to continue, will ruin Bengal forever. You must see the other side and then make your choice between two evils."⁷⁴

What irritated Patel was not that Bose wanted to form a Congress coalition in Bengal but that he seemed willing to use any methods to achieve his ends. Patel was particularly angry at allegations in the press to the effect that the Gandhiites were thinking of bringing the Congress into a federal government under the 1935 Act. He did not hesitate to blame Bose for the allegations: "Nobody is anxious to join the Federation, but you cannot prevent him from using any argument to suit his own purpose. He is making a mess of Congress politics. But what can we do?"⁷⁵

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Prasad to Patel, 11 Oct 1938, Prasad Papers, file 4A of 1938.

⁷⁴Patel to Prasad, 15 Oct 1938, ibid.

⁷⁵Patel to Prasad, 19 Nov 1938, ibid.

Gandhi's decision against an attempt to form a Congress-coalition ministry in Bengal was probably influenced by Prasad and, perhaps, by Rajagopalachari who also opposed such a move. Rajaji felt that Bose was inflaming the communal situation in Bengal and that the Working Committee would be wrong to associate itself with his campaign. The Muslims could be won over, said Rajaji, but only very gradually.⁷⁶ What might have been more important in influencing Gandhi's decision was the unstable condition of the Bengal Congress. Neither a leftist nor a conservative coalition would serve the Congress if it could not maintain itself in office.

Brabourne noted that N.R. Sarkar, the most likely leader of the Muslim half of such a coalition, had been to Wardha both before and after Bose's visit to Gandhi in December. But, said Brabourne, Sarkar denied discussing a Congress coalition with the Mahatma. Brabourne felt that Gandhi would avoid ousting the Huq government so long as the Bengal Congress was in its present shaky condition.⁷⁷ In other words, Gandhi would not try to put either Congress faction into a government that might collapse overnight. It would also seem that Gandhi might have felt that putting either faction in a position to form a coalition government would only have intensified the struggle in the Bengal Congress. The other faction would certainly have fought all the harder to come out on top. Gandhi helped neither faction and angered both. When Subhas Bose challenged the Gandhiites in the coming presidential election, even his rivals in Bengal voted against the Gandhiite candidate.

The Gandhiites had supported Bose during his first campaign for the Congress presidency in 1938. Jawaharlal had served two consecutive terms, and his presence seemed to have helped constrain the activities of Congress leftists. In October 1937, with the end of Nehru's second term approaching, Gandhi predicted that he and his colleagues would face a severe challenge from leftist factions in the Congress. They had to do something to stay on top of the situation, said Gandhi:⁷⁸

If we cannot gain control over the turbulent wind that is blowing, I am afraid the game will be lost completely. We should try our best to gain that control. If people don't listen to us, we shall have no option but to leave. A few persons having control at a few points in the present set-up will not serve our purpose. We shall be able to continue to work only if we have control over the whole organization. We will try our best to preserve such control.

⁷⁶Rajaji to B.G. Kher, 20 Oct 1938, Kher Papers, part I, file 4.

⁷⁷Brabourne to Linlithgow, 6 Jan 1939, Brabourne Papers, vol.56.

⁷⁸Gandhi to Patel, Before 9 Oct 1937, CWMG, vol.65, pp.212-13.

The Working Committee decided to make Subhas Bose, an outspoken radical, the next Congress president. This might satisfy Hindu minority groups in Bengal and Punjab and might placate a broad spectrum of leftists and anti-Gandhiites in the Congress at large. The Gandhiites would control Bose by maintaining their majority on the Working Committee. One of the key factors in the plan was to secure Nehru's assistance. In mid-December 1937, A.K. Azad seemed sanguine about the future; he told Rajendra Prasad: "If we and Jawaharlal unite on a workable programme and on certain broad fundamentals and we step ahead unitedly so as to create a confidence in all Congress circles that the Congress will follow the programme chalked out, many of our difficulties will be over."⁷⁹

The alternative, as Prasad saw it, was for the Gandhiites to withdraw from the Congress leadership for a time. But this, he told Patel, would leave the Congress ministries at the mercy of an unsympathetic Working Committee and would betray the majority of Congressmen, who wanted Gandhi's program to continue: "How can we retire?" Prasad said that, despite their initial doubts, they had gotten along well with Jawaharlal. Since the advent of office, he told Patel, Nehru had "veered more to our point of view." What was more important, said Prasad, Gandhi thought the "arrangements" made in Calcutta would work, and that should decide the matter.⁸⁰

In his final presidential report to the A.I.C.C. at Haripura, Nehru signified his agreement to the basic Gandhiite strategy. He told the committee that the goal of the Congress was to end British imperialism and to create a truly independent India. Social and economic reform were secondary issues, he said. While warning the right wing against any temptation to purge the Congress of socialists, he cautioned the leftists against adventurism: "We have to hold to our anchor [Gandhi] and not allow ourselves to be swept away in these grave times by momentary strife or by desire of temporary gain at the cost possibly of the larger good."⁸¹

The plan seemed to work well for a year, but by the end of Bose's first term as president, the Gandhiites were thoroughly disgusted with him. He had, they thought, spent far too much time on Bengal affairs and had neglected his presidential duties. Bose's early hints that he might be a candidate to succeed himself as Congress president were not

⁷⁹ Azad to Prasad, 16 Dec 1937, Prasad Papers, file III of 1937.

⁸⁰ Prasad to Patel, 21 Dec 1937, ibid., file II of 1937.

⁸¹ Nehru's report to the AICC, Feb 1938, AICC file 3 of 1938.

well received by the old guard. Some of his methods made them even more angry.

In October 1938 Profulla Ghosh told A.K. Azad that Bose had already begun his campaign in Bengal. Azad talked with Muslim friends who told him they had been approached with the story that he, Azad, had already refused the Gandhiite nomination for the presidency and that Vallabhbhai Patel was now slated to take the job. Patel, the story went, was an enemy of Hindu-Muslim unity and did not strongly oppose federation. Bose had been put forward "to save the Congress [from] all these dangers."⁸² When Azad told Patel the story he had heard, Patel had no doubt but that Bose was the source of the rumor: "I never dreamt that he [would] stoop to such dirty and mean tactics . . ."⁸³ Prasad suggested that the Gandhiites launch an immediate counterattack in the press and discourage any talk of a second term for Bose.⁸⁴

Bose chose to face the Gandhiites on the issue of federation--the proposals for a central government under the Government of India Act of 1935. In the past Bose had, as had many other Congressmen, spoken against the federal provisions of the Act. In his opening speech at the Haripura Congress, Bose attacked the 1935 Act, saying there was no possibility of the Congress accepting federation. He was confident, he said, that none of the present leaders of the Congress would be hoodwinked into accepting the Act.⁸⁵ But in August, four months later, Bose brought down the ire of the Working Committee for a statement he made implying that the situation had changed:⁸⁶

It is becoming more and more obvious that there is a very strong party in the Congress which is prepared to accept Federation, with the idea that, in practice, the safeguards and the special responsibilities of the Governor will prove no more of an obstacle to the carrying out of Congress policy than they have in the provinces.

Bose's call for concerted action against the federal provisions of the 1935 Act was repeated after the failure of his attempts to form a coalition government in Bengal. But in January 1939 Bose was presented with an opportunity to carry his attack into the national arena by becoming an anti-Gandhiite candidate for Congress president. As it happened, a temporary confusion in the Gandhiite camp and the mechanics

⁸² Azad to Patel, 28 Oct 1938, Prasad Papers, file 4A of 1938.

⁸³ Patel to Prasad, 2 Nov 1938, *ibid.*

⁸⁴ Prasad to Patel, 5 Nov 1938, *ibid.*

⁸⁵ IAR, 1938, vol.1, p.342.

⁸⁶ Brabourne to Zetland, 5 Aug 1938, Linlithgow Papers, vol.6.

of the electoral procedure gave Bose a considerable tactical advantage over his Gandhiite rival.

Under the provisions of the Congress constitution (as amended at Faizpur, December 1936), the Working Committee fixed a date after which no nominations for Congress president could be submitted to the Congress executive. Before that date, any ten Congress delegates could jointly nominate a candidate for the presidency. Once the nominations were closed on the fixed date, each candidate had ten days in which to withdraw his name from consideration. If after that period more than one name remained in nomination, the various Congress delegates would meet in their provinces and elect a president on a date fixed in advance by the Working Committee.⁸⁷

The Working Committee fixed 15 January as the last day on which nominations could be received and 28 January as the day on which the 1939 presidential election would be held if it were necessary. As of 15 January there were three nominees from the provincial Congress organizations--A.K. Azad, Subhas Bose, and Pattabhi Sitaramayya. The Gandhiites had decided on Azad but were having trouble getting him to stand. In December Gandhi had told Nehru that Azad was reluctant to accept the "crown of thorns" and that he, Nehru, should consider accepting the position himself. Gandhi said that if Nehru refused, Sitaramayya would probably be chosen by the Working Committee.⁸⁸ Nehru refused the nomination and did his best to get Azad to take the job. He said that, for a time, he thought he had succeeded.⁸⁹

According to Vallabhbhai Patel, the Gandhiites counted on Azad's standing for the presidency and considered Sitaramayya their second choice. Patel said that Azad hesitated for some time then told Gandhi on 15 January that he would bow to Working Committee pressure and would accept the nomination. On the next day, after the nominations were closed, Azad changed his mind and told Gandhi that he would withdraw his name.⁹⁰ At that point the Gandhiites were stuck with Sitaramayya.

On the 20th January Azad publicly withdrew his name from consider-

⁸⁷ AICC, Constitution of the Indian National Congress . . . Faizpur Congress 1936 (Allahabad, 1937), Art.XV.

⁸⁸ Gandhi to Nehru, 21 Dec 1938, J. Nehru Papers, part I, vol.25.

⁸⁹ Congress 1939, 28 Jan 1939.

⁹⁰ Gandhi tof India, 25 Jan 1939. Patel's press statement reads, in part: ". . . according to the constitution, Dr. Sitaramayya was the only choice left since we were clearly of the opinion that it was unnecessary to re-elect Mr. Subhas Bose." See also Patel to Prasad, 17 Jan 1939, Prasad Papers, file 1C of 1939.

ation for the presidency and urged the delegates to vote for Sitaramayya.⁹¹ Then, on the 21st, Bose announced that he would not withdraw his name; although, it was widely rumored that he had previously told the Gandhiites that he would do so.⁹² It was then too late for the old guard to change their minds and put up anyone besides Sitaramayya. Whether or not he had planned the move, Bose had delayed committing himself until his opponents were themselves committed to the weaker candidate. The Gandhiites reacted as if they had been betrayed. Shortly after Bose made his statement, the Working Committee met and issued a reply. It was, they said, an extraordinary circumstance for the Congress president to succeed himself. The Working Committee had, according to the statement, decided that this was not such a case. Bose was asked to withdraw his name.⁹³

On 15 January Bose had told the United Press that the right wing of the Congress was drifting towards constitutionalism. He said he realized that the acceptance of office had strengthened the Congress but that he was afraid it had also convinced many Congress leaders that freedom could now be achieved without a fight. And he again hinted that certain unspecified Congressmen were planning to accept federation: "I regret that of late there has been a tendency on the part of certain individual Congressmen to whittle down the Congress resolution of uncompromising hostility to Federation."⁹⁴ After the Working Committee released their statement asking him to withdraw, Bose became more specific. He said that "some influential Congress leaders" had been taking steps to bring the Congress into a federal government. He said further that it was widely believed that such a decision would be forced on the Congress within the year and that a list of prospective cabinet ministers had been drawn up.⁹⁵

Sitaramayya was not the Gandhiites first choice, but he did his best

⁹¹Times of India, 21 Jan 1939.

⁹²Ibid., 22 Jan 1939.

⁹³IAR, 1939, vol.1, pp.314-15. Seven members of the Working Committee signed the statement: Patel, Prasad, J. Doulatram, J.B. Kripalani, Shankerrao Deo, B. Desai, and J. Bajaj. Azad and Sitaramayya did not sign for what are perhaps obvious reasons--both had been nominated themselves. Nehru did not sign, perhaps because of the indirect reference to the extraordinary circumstances necessitating his second consecutive term as president. He would only say that his refusal was a matter of principle. Nehru to Patel, [24 or 25 Jan 1939], J. Nehru Papers, part I, vol.81. Sarat Bose, Harikrishna Mehtab, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, and Sarojini Naidu were also on the Working Committee but did not attend the meeting.

⁹⁴A.B. Patrika, 18 Jan 1939.

⁹⁵Ibid., 27 Jan 1939.

to assure the Congress delegates that he was indeed the representative of the old guard for that year. He said he was implacably opposed to the Government of India Act and was a proponent of the rights of states subjects. At one point he went so far as to describe himself as "an ardent devotee of the cult of Gandhism."⁹⁶ Despite this, and despite the support of the old guard and Nehru, he lost the election (see Table 7-1 below).

TABLE 7-1:⁹⁷

The Congress Presidential Election of 1939.

| PROVINCE | VOTE COUNT | |
|------------------|-------------|------|
| | Sitaramayya | Bose |
| Ajmer | 8 | 18 |
| Andhra | 181 | 28 |
| Assam | 22 | 34 |
| Bengal | 79 | 404 |
| Bihar | 197 | 70 |
| Bombay (city) | 12 | 14 |
| Burma | 6 | 8 |
| Delhi | 5 | 10 |
| Gujarat | 100 | 5 |
| Karnatak | 41 | 106 |
| Kerala | 18 | 80 |
| Mahakoshal | 68 | 67 |
| Maharashtra | 86 | 77 |
| Nagpur | 17 | 12 |
| N.W.F.P. | 23 | 18 |
| Punjab | 86 | 182 |
| Sind | 21 | 13 |
| Tamil Nadu | 102 | 110 |
| U.P. | 185 | 269 |
| Utkal (Orissa) | 99 | 44 |
| Vidarbha (Berar) | 21 | 11 |
| Totals | 1377 | 1580 |

There is some discrepancy in the number of official Congress delegates listed at the time of the election and at the time of the Tripuri Congress, but there were approximately 3280 delegates which means that about 90 percent of the delegates voted. After the election a few delegates (or their votes) were disqualified and different Indian newspapers published slightly different vote counts.

Although Bose tried to depict the contest as one between leftists and rightists in the Congress, his leftist strength by itself would not account for his winning the election. It is perhaps more accurate to

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷L/P&J/8/639.

ascribe Bose's victory to a temporary coalition of various Congress factions which were united by their opposition to the Gandhiites rather than by their support of a particular person or ideology.

In the U.P. Rafi Ahmed Kidwai had spoken in support of Bose on the eve of the election, saying that a vote for Sitaramayya was a vote for federation.⁹⁸ Governor Haig felt that this was probably a major factor in Bose's success in that province. Haig pointed out that Kidwai was B.G. Pant's chief rival for the leadership of the U.P. ministry and might have felt he would benefit from the discomfort of the Gandhiites.⁹⁹ In the C.P. N.B. Khare supported Bose.¹⁰⁰ He had reason to dislike the Gandhiites since they had forced him to relinquish control of the C.P. ministry. And in Bombay K.F. Nariman, who himself had been the victim of a Gandhiite purge, also spoke in favor of Bose's candidacy.¹⁰¹ Under pressure from Khare, the militant Hindu leader M.S. Aney agreed to support Bose but said he did not know how many of his province's delegate votes he could deliver.¹⁰² Aney was the president of the Vidarbha P.C.C. On the eve of the election, he issued a press statement urging all delegates to vote for the candidate of their choice, "irrespective of opinions expressed by the members of the Working Committee."¹⁰³

The U.P. had long been a stronghold of the leftists in the Congress, the Pant ministry had been under leftist pressure since its formation. Bose's attack on the Gandhiites, his intimation that they were planning to make some deal with the British, probably had some effect here. Although Jawaharlal Nehru had made a public statement to the effect that federation was not an issue in the election since both candidates opposed it, he made a point of saying that he was not supporting either candidate.¹⁰⁴ Nehru did not sign the Working Committee statement of 24 January asking Bose to withdraw his nomination, and for some weeks prior to the outbreak of the election controversy, Nehru had encouraged anti-federation rallies in the U.P. Over 50,000 attended a political conference on 31 December in Fyzabad to hear Nehru make a speech denouncing the Government of India Act and the British plans to force it

⁹⁸ A.B. Patrika, 27 Jan 1939.

⁹⁹ Haig to Linlithgow, 6 & 8 Feb 1939, L/P&J/5/267, and Haig Papers, vol.2.

¹⁰⁰ Mahratta, 27 Jan 1939.

¹⁰¹ A.B. Patrika, 27 Jan 1939.

¹⁰² Aney to Khare, 27 Jan 1939, Aney Papers, part II, file 5.

¹⁰³ Aney's press statement of 27 Jan 1939, ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Pioneer, 28 Jan 1939.

on the nation.¹⁰⁵ He had helped to make federation an issue which Bose was able to take advantage of. On the eve of the election M.N. Roy and other leftist leaders, notably M.R. Masani, Yusuf Meherally, and J.P. Narayan, all made statements supporting Bose.¹⁰⁶

These same factors might have been expected to favor Bose in Bihar which went heavily for Sitaramayya. However, in Bihar the Working Committee and Rajendra Prasad had a much tighter grip on the Congress organization than they did in the U.P. They had recently defeated an attempt by Swami Sahajanand to control the Bihar Congress through his kisan organization.¹⁰⁷ Just prior to the election of Congress delegates, Prasad had written to district leaders in Bihar, asking them to concentrate on keeping leftists out of the Bihar delegation and out of the A.I.C.C.¹⁰⁸ In addition, it should be noted that many Biharis looked on the Bengalis as political and economic rivals and might have voted against Bose on that account. The Congress ministry in Bihar had, since its creation, been involved in a controversy over the place of the Bengali language in Bihar schools and the position of Bengali speakers in regard to commercial opportunities and government employment in Bihar.¹⁰⁹ Many Biharis felt that the Bengali domination of their province had not ended with the separation of Bengal and Bihar in 1911.

British observers in western India said that less than ten percent of the Congress delegates in Maharashtra, Gujerat, and Karnatak were declared socialists or communists--most of these were in Maharashtra--and yet it was Karnatak that went heavily for Bose.¹¹⁰ Governor Lumley attributed this to local resentment against the dictatorial hand of Vallabhbhai Patel.¹¹¹ The Karnatak Congress leaders had, for some time, resisted Gandhiite policy, particularly that which threatened the Khoti land tenure system. The Khots were influential in Karnatak.¹¹² Sitaramayya, the Gandhiite candidate, would have been identified with the old Working Committee, with the Congress ministries, and with their policies. Delegates who opposed the Gandhiites or the ministries would

¹⁰⁵Times of India, 2 Jan 1939.

¹⁰⁶Independent India, 29 Jan 1939 and A.B. Patrika, 27 Jan 1939.

¹⁰⁷Quarterly Survey . . . 31 Jan 1939, pp.17-18, Linlithgow Papers, vol.142.

¹⁰⁸B.R. Tomlinson, The Indian National Congress and the Raj, 1929-1942, . . . (London, 1976), pp.117-18.

¹⁰⁹Times of India, 16 Jan 1939.

¹¹⁰FR, Bombay, 1st half of Feb 1939.

¹¹¹Lumley to Linlithgow, 31 Jan 1939, L/P&J/5/158.

¹¹²See chapter 4, p.108, above.

have voted for Bose.

A similar situation obtained in South India. The Viceroy's advisers felt that Sitaramayya's poor showing in Kerala and in Tamil Nadu was partially a result of local animosity towards the Rajagopalachari ministry with which Sitaramayya was closely identified.¹¹³ Andhra newspapers, which supported Sitaramayya, carried editorials blaming their champion's poor showing in Tamil Nadu and Kerala on elements in those provinces that were expressing their feeling against Andhra nationalism.¹¹⁴ An analyst writing in the Times of India supported this assumption, explaining that Sitaramayya was not much loved by Tamils who resented his demands for an Andhra state that would include parts of Madras city.¹¹⁵ In addition, of course, the vote in Kerala could be attributed to socialist strength in that province.

The most striking aspect of the election was the fact that Bose's margin of victory in Bengal and Punjab was much greater than the approximately 200 votes he won by overall. The Punjab and Bengal Congress organizations were largely comprised of Hindus who felt threatened by Muslim majorities in their provinces. The Gandhiite stand on the communal award and what was felt by many to be a disregard for the problems of the Hindu-minority provinces were factors that weighed heavily against Sitaramayya. The B.C. Roy faction in Bengal might have opposed Bose in internal conflicts but could not, given the political realities of the province, vote against a Bengali hero in a conflict with a man who was identified with anti-Bengal policies. Governor Brabourne said that the Roy faction had been uncommitted until the last moment.¹¹⁶

The above analysis is not meant to denigrate the popularity of Subhas Chandra Bose. He was a hero of the nation's youth. He had, through long terms in prison and in exile, demonstrated his willingness to sacrifice his freedom and his health in the nation's cause. He had rubbed shoulders with world leaders in Europe and had been in the public eye since his affiliation with C.R. Das in the early 1920s. Bose was a rousing speaker, had what N.C. Chaudhuri described as the ability "to say

¹¹³Quarterly Survey . . . 31 Jan 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.142.

¹¹⁴FR, Madras, 1st half of Feb 1939.

¹¹⁵Times of India, 30 Jan 1939.

¹¹⁶Brabourne to Linlithgow, 5 Feb 1939, Brabourne Papers, vol.56a.

a thousand times the same things in different forms, and to get animated without end in the face of the same objects."¹¹⁷ In comparison Pattabhi Sitaramayya, the official Congress historian, was not widely revered outside his native Andhra. He had the misfortune of being closely identified with Gandhiite policy without having the stature of Gandhi's more intimate associates. The men who might have opposed Bose (Abdul Ghaffar Khan, A.K. Azad, or Rajendra Prasad) would probably have done better than Sitaramayya did.

Gandhi quickly let it be known that he was not going to allow Bose's election to be passed off as anything less than a direct challenge to the authority of the old guard. Under the headline "I REJOICE IN THIS DEFEAT," the Mahatma accepted the full onus of Sitaramayya's rejection by the Congress. Having already "retired" from Congress politics in 1934, Gandhi could not now repeat that dramatic gesture, but he could threaten much more. This time, implied Gandhi, the Congress would not only lose his services but those of the old guard and of the Congress ministries as well. He began by criticising Bose's "arguments" and "manifestoes," and his "unjustified and unworthy" attack on his colleagues in the old Working Committee. Nevertheless, he said, he was glad of Bose's victory; it would give him an opportunity to see whether or not the Congress really wanted to go on without its old leaders:

I am glad of his victory. And since I was instrumental in inducing Dr. Pattabhi not to withdraw his name as a candidate when Maulana Saheb [Azad] withdrew, the defeat is more mine than his. I am nothing if I do not represent definite principles and policy. Therefore, it is plain to me that the delegates do not approve of the principles and policy for which I stand.

Gandhi continued by casting some doubt on Bose's majority. There was much corruption in the Congress, he said, and many of the delegates were elected by "bogus members." Gandhi said he was not suggesting that the legitimacy of the delegates be challenged; it would be sufficient to see that the Congress was purged of bogus members in order to guarantee the proper conduct of future elections. He then said that since the present Congress ministers had been chosen by the old majority (by the Gandhiites), they might also have to resign their offices: "Congress ministers have after all to live from day to day. It matters little to them whether they are recalled on an issue in which they are in agreement with the Congress policy or whether they resign because they are in disagreement with the Congress."

¹¹⁷N.C. Chaudhuri, "Subhas Chandra Bose," in the Illustrated Weekly of India, 18 Sep 1955, p.18.

Subhas had won the contest, said Gandhi, and now he would have to pursue what he felt was "the most forward and boldest policy and programme." The minority might not be able to keep up with him, said Gandhi. In that case they would not stay and obstruct him; they would leave the Congress: "Those, therefore, who feel uncomfortable in being in the Congress may come out, not in a spirit of ill-will, but with the deliberate purpose of rendering more effective service."¹¹⁸

Although Gandhi publicly treated the prospect of resignations by the various Congress ministries as an unimportant consequence of the election, it was, perhaps, the single greatest threat he held over the opposition. Bose had not been made Congress president by people anxious to wreck the parliamentary program. His victory was not a mandate to abandon the Congress ministries. Bose admitted as much. When the election results were declared, he assured his supporters that there would be no extreme changes in the Congress ministries.¹¹⁹

While the delegates might have been ready to criticise Congress ministries by voting for Bose, they were not necessarily ready to see them all displaced. Shortly after the election, various Congress meetings were held to congratulate Bose. An observer for the British in Madras noted that at the meetings in his province there was, indeed, some criticism of the conservative members of the Congress. But, said the writer, he had been told that "an overwhelming majority" of the Tamil Nadu delegates (who had just helped elect Bose) also signed a circular letter expressing their "confidence in Gandhiji and the present All-India Working Committee and Parliamentary Sub Committee."¹²⁰

Bose might have been able to maintain the Congress in office in the U.P., C.P., Orissa, and Assam, where he had powerful allies in the Congress. He would have had great difficulty replacing the Bombay ministry without the help of Vallabhbhai Patel, the Madras ministry without the help of Rajagopalachari, or the Bihar ministry without the help of Rajendra Prasad. And it was not only the old guard that Bose had angered during his term as Congress president. He had been an

¹¹⁸ Harijan, 4 Feb 1939. Gandhi tried not to use ideological terms. He particularly disliked Bose's use of the words "right" and "left" and suggested that he find better designations for the "parties of your imagination." Gandhi to Bose, 5 Feb 1939, J. Nehru Papers, part I, vol.25.

¹¹⁹ Pioneer, 31 Jan 1939.

¹²⁰ FR, Madras, 1st half of Feb 1939. M.N. Roy said later that 187 of the 232 Tamil Nadu delegates signed the letter. Independent India, 19 Mar 1939.

unpopular administrator. He had, for example, angered many Congress ministers by what they felt to be his high-handedness in the administration of the National Planning Committee.

In his opening speech at Haripura (April 1938), Bose had called for the formation of a planning commission which would advise the future Indian state on a "scheme for gradually socializing our entire agricultural and industrial system in both the spheres of production and appropriation."¹²¹ The Gandhiites might not have agreed with the aims of such a commission as expressed by Bose, but they did agree to allow the president to convene a conference of ministers of industries to report on existing industries and needs for new ones.¹²² Bose called a meeting to be held in Bombay in December 1938. Instead of asking the various chief ministers to appoint representatives to the committee, Bose appointed members of their governments without consulting them. This, according to Governor Lumley of Bombay, infuriated them.¹²³ Bose further angered his ministers by appropriating funds from each provincial government to support the committee, again without consulting them.¹²⁴

Many Congress ministers openly canvassed for Sitaramayya during the election, and after the election the ministers of five Congress governments were reported to have given Gandhi letters of resignation to use as he saw fit in the coming struggle at Tripuri.¹²⁵ The Working Committee (except for Sarat Bose) made statements later which expressed their opinion that Bose had neglected the Congress organization while he devoted his time to politics in Bengal. Nehru mentioned this complaint in a letter to Bose written shortly after the election.¹²⁶

In early February B.G. Kher told the Governor of Bombay that the Gandhiites had consulted him and other Congress leaders in order to determine a united course of action. It was decided, said Kher, to give Bose freedom to act but absolutely no support from the Working Committee. This, they decided, would show up the poverty of Bose's support in the Congress. The Gandhiites would not compromise with Bose, said Kher, even if the conflict led to a split in the Congress.¹²⁷ On 22 February twelve members of the Working Committee resigned their offices.

¹²¹ IAR, 1938, vol.1, pp.341-2.

¹²² Ibid., vol.2, p.260.

¹²³ Lumley to Linlithgow, 7 Nov 1938, Erskine Papers, vol.13.

¹²⁴ Quarterly Survey . . . 31 Jan 1939, p.5, Linlithgow Papers, vol.142.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 30 Apr 1939, p.5, Linlithgow Papers, vol.142.

¹²⁶ Nehru to Bose, 4 Feb 1939, Nehru, Bunch of Old Letters, pp.317-21. See also, press statement by J.B. Kripalani, Searchlight, 7 May 1939.

¹²⁷ Lumley to Linlithgow, 12 Feb 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.107.

There remained only Bose's brother, Sarat, and Jawaharlal Nehru. And Nehru issued a public statement, castigating Bose, which, in effect, took him out of the committee too. Nehru said that, at a time when the international situation demanded unity in the Congress, Bose had plunged the Congress into disunity. He had campaigned on vague leftist slogans, but had outlined no specific program or even said where he differed with the existing leaders. He had, said Nehru, slandered his colleagues on the Working Committee, accusing them of planning a deal on federation, when, in fact, he had no evidence on which to base his accusations.¹²⁸

Bose was soon made to realize the poverty of his position in the Congress. Governor **Brabourne** said that Bose was under extreme pressure from his most radical supporters who wanted a direct challenge to the Gandhites at Tripuri.¹²⁹ M.N. Roy wrote to Bose on 1 February, warning him that he would lose Royist backing if he became another puppet president: ". . . the new leadership of the Congress should have the courage and conviction of acting independently even of the wishes of Gandhiji, when these run counter to the objective revolutionary urge of the movement."¹³⁰ Swami Sahajanand had supported Bose in the election, and he too called for a bold stand at Tripuri.¹³¹ Bengal radicals, Royists, and minority kisan groups had no great stake in maintaining Congress unity, but some of Bose's leftist supporters had much to lose if the Congress were suddenly catapulted into a war between the left and the right.

The executive committee of the C.S.P. had pressed for some compromise with the Gandhites even before the resignation of the twelve Working Committee members was announced. A statement from the party executive was published on 22 February. They said there was no question of a left-right split. The C.S.P. had supported Bose in the election, but that did not indicate any lack of support by them for Gandhi.¹³² Unity was all important. These same socialist leaders issued a joint statement a few days later denying that they had refused to serve on Bose's Working Committee. They would make a decision on that issue when the time came, they said.¹³³ On 27 February J.P. Narayan

¹²⁸ Times of India, 23 Feb 1939.

¹²⁹ Brabourne to Linlithgow, 17 Feb 1939, L/P&J/5/144.

¹³⁰ Roy to Bose, 1 Feb 1939, quoted in L. Gordon, Bengal: The Nationalist Movement, 1876-1940 (New York, 1974), p.271.

¹³¹ A.B. Patrika, 27 Feb 1939.

¹³² Searchlight, 22 Feb 1939.

¹³³ Ibid., 24 Feb 1939.

published a statement asking for Congress unity and calling for Bose to clear up the "confusion" that surrounded his statements about the possibility of a deal being struck with the British on the federal issue.¹³⁴ He wanted Bose to apologize. M.R. Masani also issued a statement calling for Congress unity. He criticised M.N. Roy for demanding an end to peaceful co-existence with the Gandhiites. The C.S.P. would not support such tactics, said Masani; it would not be a part of "any so-called leftist Block."¹³⁵

Immediately after the election, Bose began to make friendly overtures to the Gandhiites. He spoke to Nehru about the possibility of a reconciliation and discussed with him a draft proposal which he later presented to Gandhi. Bose reportedly told Gandhi that he would give the Mahatma his full support in the states struggle if Gandhi would agree to leave other issues for discussion by the entire Congress at Tripuri.¹³⁶ Bose also tried to play down the implication of his campaign remarks about a deal on federation. On February 8th he told Nehru that the members of the Working Committee were falling into a British trap by making so much of the federal scheme and ignoring the real issues.¹³⁷

On 19 February Bose went to Wardha to put his case to Gandhi. Gandhi was reported by the Indian press to have told Bose there was no possibility of a rapprochement.¹³⁸ N.N. Sirkar, the legal member of the Viceroy's council, told Lord Linlithgow that the interview between Bose and Gandhi was far more bitter than the papers let on. Gandhi had, said Sirkar, charged Bose with "issuing manifestoes as if it were a municipal election." Gandhi's advisors were said to be very skeptical about the genuineness of Bose's recently announced illness. And, said Sirkar, Gandhi was determined to resist Bose's efforts to smooth over their differences with some joint attack on the Raj over the situation in the Indian states.¹³⁹ The subsequent resignations of the Gandhiites from the Working Committee seemed to preclude any amicable settlement

¹³⁴ A.B. Patrika, 27 Feb 1939.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 28 Feb 1939.

¹³⁶ F. Wylie to Linlithgow, 18 Feb 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.107.

¹³⁷ Bose to Nehru, 8 Feb 1939, Nehru, Bunch of Old Letters, p.323.

¹³⁸ Times of India, 21 Feb 1939.

¹³⁹ Sirkar to Linlithgow, 24 Feb 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.121. Bose was reported to have come down with pneumonia. Times of India, 21 Feb 1939.

before the Tripuri Congress, scheduled for the second week in March.

Shortly after Bose's declaration, on 21 January, that he would not withdraw his name from consideration for the presidency, the Gandhiites launched a renewed effort to bring about reform in the princely states. On 24 January Gandhi spoke of the recent awakening in the states. He said the Congress would not stand by and see injustice done. The Mahatma told a Times of India interviewer that he had not changed his policy but that conditions in the states had changed.¹⁴⁰ On the 25th Vallabhbhai Patel announced "with deepest regret" that the Thakore Saheb of Rajkot had refused to live up to the agreement of 26 December and that, therefore, the satyagraha in Rajkot would be resumed.¹⁴¹ At about the same time, the Congress ministry in Orissa threatened to resign if the governor carried out an order of extradition on ten detainees being held in Cuttack jail to face charges by authorities in the Orissa states.¹⁴²

After the Congress election and Bose's victory, the controversy over political activity in the states increased as the Congress session at Tripuri approached. In early February Vallabhbhai Patel accused the British Resident in Rajkot of encouraging the Thakore Saheb to go back on his agreement. Patel said that if the paramount power did not stop stifling justice in Rajkot the Bombay ministry would be forced to resign.¹⁴³ Gandhi also complained of British interference in Rajkot and in Jaipur where Jamnalal Bajaj had been arrested. He said that Congress activity was justified as a reaction to British interference. And he added that in any case both protest movements were being led and manned by states people which made them entirely internal affairs, neither contradicting the Congress policy of non-interference nor justifying the involvement of the British.¹⁴⁴ But even as Congress activity increased the Viceroy was receiving indications that the Gandhiites' basic policy towards political activity in the states had not changed.

On 31 January Sir Harry Haig told Lord Linlithgow that he very much doubted that Congress ministries would begin resigning over the controversy in the states. Haig said that Congress radicals such as Sampurnanand were indeed working to increase the agitation but that the real power in Congress (he mentioned Jawaharlal Nehru) was continuing to

¹⁴⁰ Times of India, 24 Jan 1939.

¹⁴² National Herald, 28 Jan 1939.

¹⁴⁴ Harijan, 11 Feb 1939.

¹⁴¹ Harijan, 4 Feb 1939.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 7 Feb 1939.

work to stop the spread of agitation over the states issue.¹⁴⁵ A few days later D. Misra approached Sir Finlatter Stewart to tell him that Gandhi was willing to meet Lord Linlithgow or to go through some intermediary to discuss the impact of Bose's election on the political situation. According to Misra, Gandhi felt that talks on federation could continue but that if Bose and the leftists were in a position of power at the end of the year, the chances of a compromise would be much diminished.¹⁴⁶ The Viceroy was also informed by the Governor of the C.P. that, in the opinion of local observers, Gandhi was using the states issue to demonstrate to his followers that he was as much in favor of freedom in the states as was Bose and was taking decisive action while Bose was merely talking.¹⁴⁷

In mid-February Lord Linlithgow told the Secretary of State that Gandhi's calls to action and Nehru's February 7th statement supporting the struggle in the states might have been intended as a ploy: "Thus States agitation may preserve Gandhi's leadership and throw into the background Bose's demand for an ultimatum on Federation and independence."¹⁴⁸ In a discussion with R.M. Maxwell, the Viceroy said that he had considered encouraging the princes to be firm in the face of Congress demands even if it led to the resignation of Congress ministries. But, he told Maxwell, he had decided against a showdown for various reasons. Linlithgow said he was concerned that a wide-spread civil disobedience movement might tie up the states police and military forces and might even absorb Indian Army troops at a time when a world war was imminent. The princes, thought Linlithgow, must be free to contribute to the war effort when war came. Maxwell added that it seemed unlikely that the British public would support an extended period of repression before a war had actually broken out.¹⁴⁹ The Gandhiites were in a good position to increase their efforts in the states.

On 27 February Gandhi went to Rajkot to take depositions from the satyagrahis there. He presented an ultimatum to the Thakore Saheb on 2 March and began a "fast to the death" on the next day in demand of something quite different from what the Thakore Saheb had agreed to in the previous December. Gandhi asked to be able to name the chairman

¹⁴⁵ Haig to Linlithgow, 31 Jan 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.102.

¹⁴⁶ Stewart to Linlithgow, 3 Feb 1939, L/P&J/8/639.

¹⁴⁷ F. Wylie to Linlithgow, 14 Feb 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.18.

¹⁴⁸ Linlithgow to Zetland, 13 Feb 1939, L/P&J/8/639.

¹⁴⁹ Viceroy's notes on a discussion with R.M. Maxwell, 17 Feb 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.157.

of the reforms committee and four other members, suggested that the Thakore Saheb's appointees be limited to three and have only an advisory function, and he asked that the work of the committee be finished and implemented within a very limited and specific time frame.¹⁵⁰ The prince had (on 26 December) agreed to allow Vallabhbhai Patel to name seven members of the reforms committee. He had undertaken to name the chairman and two other members who would have full powers in the committee. He had not agreed to put any specific time limit on the committee's deliberations.¹⁵¹

Even before Gandhi went to Rajkot the press was critical of the old guard's motives in reactivating the states struggle. One political cartoon which appeared in mid-February showed Nehru and Gandhi blowing on a smoldering fire from which great clouds of smoke labeled "Trouble in the States" billowed. A character not unlike Vallabhbhai Patel stood in the foreground and explained: "It serves a double purpose: it worries the British Lion and covers up some disagreements within the Congress."¹⁵² After Gandhi began his fast, a number of editorials appeared which suggested that Gandhi had materially changed the terms of his demand on the ruler of Rajkot and which hinted that the Mahatma might have more on his mind than a quick settlement of the Rajkot dispute.

Responding to an editorial in the Times of India, Vallabhbhai Patel denied that Gandhi had asked for anything substantially different from what the Thakore Saheb had agreed to and had failed to comply with. The main thing, said Patel, was that the Thakore Saheb had agreed to let the Praja Parishad (Hindu-controlled and Congress-supported state political organization) have a majority on the committee. This, said Patel, was what Gandhi was really demanding.¹⁵³ Later statements in Harijan berated the "mis-reporting of facts" in the English and Scottish press. The Gandhiites hotly denied that the Mahatma had intended to stage a spectacular event at Rajkot in order to detract public attention from the coming events at Tripuri.¹⁵⁴ But whether or not he had that intention, his actions had that effect.

¹⁵⁰ Gandhi to Thakore Saheb, 2 Mar 1939, L/P&S/13/1500. Gandhi published an edited version of this letter in Harijan, 11 Mar 1939. The British Resident in Rajkot described a slightly-different, third version of the letter which he seems to have gotten from the Thakore Saheb. Crown Representative to Secretary of State, 3 Mar 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol. 107.

¹⁵¹ Harijan, 4 Feb 1939.

¹⁵² Pioneer, 19 Feb 1939.

¹⁵³ Harijan, 11 Mar 1939.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 25 Mar 1939.

Gandhi's public fasts had an enormous impact on the Indian, and indeed on the world, press. He had not staged such an event since the summer of 1933 when he began to fast to the death for permission to do Harijan work while he was in prison. He had fasted for seven days to "atone" for a violent communal incident in July 1934. But that was a "fixed period" fast which was not in demand of any specific action or agreement.¹⁵⁵

Gandhi's first public fast in five years was front-page news in both the national and international papers. It even momentarily displaced news of the Spanish Civil War and of the impending war in Europe in the headlines of the New York Times and of the London dailies. And from the 4th to the 8th of March, the major Indian newspapers relegated coverage of the upcoming Tripuri conference to their inner pages. Gandhi denied any intention of detracting from the pageant at Tripuri: "I have made every effort that is humanly possible to go to Tripuri. But God willed it otherwise." He told the delegates not to be influenced by the possibility of his death: ". . . my life is not worth keeping if anxiety to save it deflects the attention of the nation from the main purpose."¹⁵⁶

Lord Linlithgow was asked to intervene in Rajkot even before Gandhi began his fast. On 1 March two of the Viceroy's council, the education and legal members, told Linlithgow that, in their opinion, if Gandhi fasted and died in Rajkot the resulting uproar would do great harm to the interests of Rajkot and the states in general. They urged him to take some action.¹⁵⁷ The legal member wired again on 6 March¹⁵⁸ as did the British Resident at Hyderabad. The latter said that his state was "much perturbed at possible repercussions on Congress' attitude to States in general if anything untoward happens as a result of the fast."¹⁵⁹ That is, if Gandhi died, all hell would break loose. B.G. Pant told Sir Harry Haig that the Congress ministries would be dissolved if Gandhi died. He said he was going to Tripuri to be in on discussions which would follow in that eventuality.¹⁶⁰ On 4 March the Congress

¹⁵⁵Notes on Gandhi's fasts, 1919 to 1942, L/P&J/8/600.

¹⁵⁶Harijan, 11 Mar 1939. Gandhi's denial made the front page of the New York Times, 6 Mar 1939.

¹⁵⁷Jagdish Prasad and N.N. Sircar to Linlithgow, 1 Mar 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.121.

¹⁵⁸Sircar to Linlithgow, 6 Mar 1939, ibid.

¹⁵⁹Resident of Hyderabad to G. Laithwaite, 6 Mar 1939, ibid.

¹⁶⁰Haig to Linlithgow, 7 Mar 1939, ibid., vol.102.

ministries in the U.P., C.P., Bombay, and Bihar threatened to resign if Gandhi's health were allowed to remain in jeopardy.¹⁶¹

The Rajkot fast was begun with specific demands but was ended by Gandhi when the Viceroy agreed to see to the implementation of the December 26 agreement. On 7 March Gandhi told the Viceroy's agent that he would end his fast and would, as the Viceroy suggested, defer to the judgement of the Chief Justice of India in respect to what the Thakore Saheb had actually agreed to. The other things he had asked for, said Gandhi, could await future discussion.¹⁶² Thus, on 8 March, the day before the A.I.C.C. deliberations were to begin at Tripuri, Gandhi was feted as a hero throughout India. The fact that he had not gotten exactly what he asked for seemed immaterial.

Gandhi told the Thakore Saheb that the reason he was in such a hurry was that he wanted to be able to attend the Tripuri Congress: "If I do not go over a thousand coworkers will be disappointed and lakhs of poor people will become disconsolate. Time therefore has a special value for me at this juncture."¹⁶³ But, although Gandhi ended his fast before the Congress session began, he did not attend. Gandhi hadn't missed a general session of the Congress, except when he was in jail, since he returned from South Africa in 1915.¹⁶⁴ When Bose pleaded with him to come to Tripuri, Gandhi said his doctors would not allow it and that when he could travel he would go to Delhi to be available to give testimony to the Chief Justice. Bose then wired that he would be very grateful if Gandhi would merely make a brief appearance at Tripuri on 12 March, the last day of the session: "Your personal blessing absolutely essential." Again Gandhi refused.¹⁶⁵

The fact was that Gandhi had decided to withhold his "personal blessing" from the Tripuri conference some weeks before he actually went to Rajkot. Nehru had asked Gandhi to make some gesture of reconciliation with Bose, and on 3 February Gandhi told Nehru: "After the

¹⁶¹Pioneer, 6 Mar 1939. See also Kher to Lumley, 5 Mar 1939, Kher Papers, part I, file 18.

¹⁶²Gandhi to E.C. Gibson, 7 Mar 1939, Harijan, 11 Mar 1939.

¹⁶³Gandhi to Thakore Saheb, 2 Mar 1939, I/P&S/13/1500. The first quoted sentence was omitted from the version of the letter published in Harijan, 11 Mar 1939. But the letter appeared in full in the Statesman, 4 Mar 1939.

¹⁶⁴Gandhi did not take part in the open session or preliminary meetings of the 1927 session, but he was at the opening ceremony.

¹⁶⁵Gandhi-Bose correspondence, A.B. Patrika, 9 Mar 1939.

election and the manner in which it was fought, I feel that I shall serve the country by absenting myself from the Congress at the forthcoming session. Moreover my health is none too good. I would like you to help me. Please do not press me to attend."¹⁶⁶ In mid-February R.S. Shukla told the Governor of the C.P. that Gandhi would probably not go to the Tripuri conference.¹⁶⁷

On 3 March Bose made a public speech in Calcutta in which he denied having charged any particular Congress leader with collaboration. He said he had only been drawing the Working Committee's attention to a widespread fear among the general public. He said he had not endorsed or tried to support that fear: "As public men [the Working Committee] could not ignore what the public thought or said even when [the public] erred."¹⁶⁸ What looked to be the major stumbling block to some show of reconciliation at Tripuri was Bose's insistence on a six-month ultimatum to the British.

On the eve of the A.I.C.C. session of 9 March, C.S.P. leaders Narendra Deva, Achut Patwardhan, and J.P. Narayan, were reported to be pressing Jawaharlal to introduce a compromise resolution on federation. They wanted to delete any hint of censure of the old Working Committee and to stop the ultimatum. If Bose made these concessions, the C.S.P. leaders thought the Gandhiites might then accept a very strongly worded rejection of the federal portion of the 1935 Act. Nehru refused to move such a resolution; although, it was said that he agreed to support a compromise of some kind.¹⁶⁹ By 8 March various press reports were circulating to the effect that the C.S.P. leaders had warned Bose that they would not support him if the Congress split on the issue of the ultimatum.¹⁷⁰

In an undated, unsigned paper prepared by a member of the C.S.P. executive (possibly M.R. Masani) it was stated that Yusuf Meherally had represented the C.S.P. in a pre-election discussion with Bose. Meherally told Bose the Congress socialists would accept Azad's candidacy. The C.S.P., he said, saw no reason to back a leftist candidate, because there

¹⁶⁶ Gandhi to Nehru, 3 Feb 1939, Nehru, Bunch of Old Letters, p.248.

¹⁶⁷ Wylie to Linlithgow, 19 Feb 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.18.

¹⁶⁸ Searchlight, 4 Mar 1939.

¹⁶⁹ A.B. Patrika, 8 Mar 1939.

¹⁷⁰ Searchlight, 8 Mar 1939.

was no possibility of a leftist-controlled A.I.C.C. According to the paper, Bose gave the C.S.P. no indication that he intended to challenge the Gandhiite candidate, and the C.S.P. had given him no assurances that they would support him if he did. The paper further alleged that it had subsequently been proven that Bose had entered into a mutual-assistance pact with the C.P.I.¹⁷¹

The Gandhiites, for their part, were busy preparing a counter offensive against Bose. Just before he left the U.P. to attend the Tripuri Congress, G.B. Pant, acting on Nehru's advice,¹⁷² launched an attack against the Government of India for preparing amendments to the 1935 Act to make it easier to control dissidents in India. Pant asked Governor Haig to convey his sentiments to the Secretary of State. If Haig refused, said Pant, he would contact the Secretary directly.¹⁷³ Haig said he initially thought that the Gandhiites were preparing some sort of satyagraha against the government in order to cover over the internal Congress dispute with another flurry of anti-imperial rhetoric. He later decided that Pant was merely establishing his nationalist credentials before going to do battle with Bose.¹⁷⁴

When Pant arrived at Tripuri he announced his intention to introduce a resolution at the A.I.C.C. meeting, expressing confidence in Gandhi and in the old Working Committee, and deploring any "aspersions" that might have been directed against them. The resolution would also direct Bose to secure Gandhi's prior approval of a new Working Committee:¹⁷⁵

In view of the critical situation that may develop during the coming year and in view of the fact that Mahatma Gandhi alone can lead the Congress and the country to victory during such crisis, the Committee regards it as imperative that the Congress Executive should command his implicit confidence and requests the President to nominate the Working Committee in accordance with the wishes of Gandhiji.

The Gandhiites had made it very difficult for resolutions to be submitted to the Congress except through the Working Committee.¹⁷⁶ The constitution required that any such resolution be forwarded to the president with the signatures of at least 25 A.I.C.C. members. It also

¹⁷¹"The Problem of Left Unity," Mar 1939, Narayan Papers, part II, file 13

¹⁷²Nehru to Pant, 21 Feb 1939, J. Nehru Papers, part I, vol.79.

¹⁷³Haig to Linlithgow, 8 Mar 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.102.

¹⁷⁴Haig to Linlithgow, 8 Mar 1939, Haig Papers, vol.2.

¹⁷⁵IAR, 1939, vol.1, pp.334-5.

¹⁷⁶See Chapter 1, p.21, above.

had to be discussed by the Subjects Committee and to have received the support of at least one-third of the members then present. The Working Committee had ceased to exist, and Pant arrived at the A.I.C.C. meeting with the signatures of 160 A.I.C.C. members in support of his resolution.¹⁷⁷ He had thus demonstrated that he could command the support of one-third of the 420 odd A.I.C.C. members even if all of them attended the Subjects Committee meeting. Bose could not now declare the resolution unconstitutional, although he did rule it out of order for discussion at the first day of the A.I.C.C. meeting.¹⁷⁸

Bose had been taken ill with pneumonia on 20 February and was unable to ride in the elephant procession which opened the full Congress session. Fifty-two elephants, one for each year the Congress had been in session, escorted Bose's photograph to the main compound.¹⁷⁹ Bose had arrived earlier in an ambulance. He managed to preside over the first day's A.I.C.C. meeting on 9 March. He was present on a stretcher, attended by a number of his nieces who made a great show of fanning his prostrate form and holding ice packs to his forehead.¹⁸⁰ As Bose was unable to attend the remaining sessions of the Congress, A.K. Azad, the senior ex-president attending, presided over the rest of the meetings.

The presidential opening speech was read by Subhas Bose's brother Sarat. Subhas had rejected the advice of C.S.P. leaders to omit his call for an ultimatum. Once peace came to Europe, said Bose, England would attempt to reassert her authority in all parts of the Empire. But now that war in Europe threatened England directly the time had come to push for the Congress national demand. If the British did not make a satisfactory reply within a stated time limit, said Bose, the Congress should launch mass civil disobedience.¹⁸¹ Bose showed little willingness to compromise with the Gandhites, and they, in their turn, showed every indication of pressing ahead with the Pant resolution.

After the opening speeches of the first day's session, R.M. Lohia, N.G. Ranga, and Narendra Deva each spoke against the Pant resolution while appealing for Gandhi's support and for unity.¹⁸² On the second day, the first full day of deliberations, M.S. Aney and G.B. Pant suggested that Pant's controversial resolution be deferred to a future meeting

¹⁷⁷Times of India, 9 Mar 1939. An article in the Hindustan Times, 10 Mar 1939, claimed that Pant also had the signatures of over 1000 of the delegates.

¹⁷⁸Times of India, 9 Mar 1939.

¹⁷⁹P. Sitaramayya, The History of the INC (Bombay, 1946), vol.2, p.109.

¹⁸⁰Statesman, 11 Mar 1939.

¹⁸¹Ibid.

¹⁸²Hindustan Times, 11 Mar 1939.

of the A.I.C.C. Azad counted hands and declared the motion carried at which point the Bengal delegation broke into a cacophonous demonstration. While the crowd tried to shout him down, Nehru addressed them in Hindi. He said that matters before the Congress had to be decided by a majority and that Azad could not take a division of the house with all its visitors and guests present; such a division could only be taken in the Subjects Committee pandal on the following day. Nehru continued to stand before the rioting delegates, and, when they would not be silent, he lost his temper: ". . . a handful of delegates cannot try to stop the proceedings after the majority has given its verdict. This is not democracy. This is goondaism. This is fascism." Sarat Bose was with Nehru on the platform and together they managed to quiet the demonstration after more than an hour's uproar.¹⁸³

Aney rose after the clamor had died and asked that his suggestion to defer the resolution to a future meeting of the A.I.C.C. be withdrawn. This was put to the house and carried.¹⁸⁴ In the lull that followed, J.P. Narayan moved the C.S.P. compromise resolution on federation. It incorporated a rejection of the Government of India Act without the ultimatum that Subhas Bose had demanded. Sarat Bose objected to the absence of the ultimatum and was challenged by Narayan who said that he, Sarat, had previously agreed to the resolution in its present form. Sarat hotly denied that he had done so. Jawaharlal supported the resolution and said that it had the unanimous support of the Subjects Committee. The resolution passed by a show of hands.¹⁸⁵ Sri Prakasha then moved a resolution authorizing the A.I.C.C. to take action (including amending the constitution) to remove defects in the Congress machinery which had led to the enrollment of bogus members and to fraudulent elections. This resolution passed with little controversy.¹⁸⁶

At nine a.m. on the third and last day of the session, Pant reintroduced his resolution expressing confidence in the old Working Committee. The session was held in the Subjects Committee pandal so that it could be limited to delegates and representatives of the press. K.F. Nariman asked that the resolution be postponed until the president could attend the meeting. This was voted on and rejected. Other Bose supporters asked that mention of "aspersions" cast against the Working Committee be

¹⁸³IAR, 1939, vol.1, pp.327-30. Nehru apologized to Sarat Bose for having lost his temper, saying that he did not realize that his voice was being carried on the microphone. Nehru to Sarat Bose, 24 Mar 1939, Nehru, Bunch of Old Letters, p.326.

¹⁸⁴IAR, 1939, vol.1, p.330. ¹⁸⁵Ibid., pp.330-1.

¹⁸⁶Ibid., p.341.

omitted, and still others wanted Gandhi to be asked to "advise" the president on the selection of a new Working Committee and not to "approve" the selection. M.N. Roy argued that the resolution amounted to a censure of Bose and that it would cripple the new president before he was given a chance to implement his new policy. After some debate, J.P. Narayan spoke for the C.S.P. He said that his party had supported Bose in the election but that it had done so for political not ideological reasons. The socialists felt that the Congress needed to be guided away from the constitutional path it had followed for the past few years. But, said Narayan, this would not be achieved by splitting the Congress along ideological lines. Narayan said that the C.S.P. had tried to persuade Bose to compromise with the Gandhiites and had failed. In the interest of Congress unity, said Narayan, the C.S.P. directed its delegates to abstain from voting on the Pant resolution.¹⁸⁷

Pant then rose and made a final speech for the Gandhiites. He said that whenever nations had progressed they had relied on the leadership of just one man. Germany had its Herr Hitler, said Pant; whether or not they agreed with his methods they could not deny that Germany had progressed under Hitler's leadership. Similarly, he said, Italy had risen because of Mussolini and Russia because of Lenin. Yusuf Mererally interrupted to object to Pant's comparing Lenin with the fascist dictators Hitler and Mussolini. Pant said that he was not defending the dictators' methods; he was merely saying that their people loved them and followed them out of love. The Indian people loved Gandhi, he concluded, and would be fools not to follow him. Despite this rather unfortunate analogy, Pant's resolution was passed without a division, even though the debate had been held in the Subjects Committee pandal in order that a division could be taken.¹⁸⁸

After the Pant resolution was passed, most of the visitors and a number of the delegates left the pandal. One reporter estimated that only about 150 remained to carry on the Congress business.¹⁸⁹ Rajendra Prasad then introduced the Gandhiite resolution on the Indian States. The Haripura resolution and the Gandhiite policy of continued caution

¹⁸⁷Statesman, 13 & 14 Mar 1939. Roy's speech was given in Independent India, 26 Mar 1939. The most thorough reporting of the public meetings of the Tripuri Congress appeared in the Statesman and in the Times of India; although, most major Indian newspapers had reporters at the Congress session. Even the New York Times sent an independent correspondent to the Tripuri Congress.

¹⁸⁸Statesman, 13 & 14 Mar 1939.

¹⁸⁹Pioneer, 14 Mar 1939.

had been proved correct, he said; they had encouraged the states people to organize their own institutions. In order that the continuation of this policy be assured, Prasad asked the Congress to give the next Working Committee the power to issue appropriate instructions to their workers. When the political awakening in the states had become more complete, said Prasad, Congress could take a more active part in the struggle.¹⁹⁰

Speaking for the socialists, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya responded that it was ridiculous to claim that Congress inaction had stimulated the political awakening in the states. The Congress could, however, offer a real service to the states people by directing and actively encouraging a strong freedom movement in the princely states, she said. After continued debate, Prasad said that the Congress should not make empty promises to the states people. Congress leaders could, in future, act without a resolution. Gandhi, Patel and Bajaj, he said, had not waited for a resolution; they had acted when the psychological moment was right. The socialist amendments were rejected and the original resolution passed unaltered.¹⁹¹

The Gandhiites had demonstrated their power over the Congress delegates with the passage of the Pant resolution. They had shown even greater power in the earlier meeting of the Subjects Committee (and the new A.I.C.C.) which passed the Pant resolution by a vote of 218 to 133 on March 10th.¹⁹² What Bose had failed to accomplish at Tripuri he could hardly expect to force through a later meeting of the A.I.C.C. However, the Gandhiites still faced strong opposition in the provincial and district committees.

Sir Harry Haig reported that Pant returned from Tripuri somewhat disheartened at the prospect of facing the continuing divisions in his own province.¹⁹³ Leftists who had supported the Gandhiites were now in a position to demand concessions, while die-hard supporters of Bose might be willing to resort to more and more radical methods now that they had failed at Tripuri. The U.P. seemed to be a major problem area. The Viceroy asked Gandhi (on 4 April) if he did not fear that continued disorder might lead to communal and agrarian violence in the province. Gandhi told Linlithgow that he did indeed fear such an eventuality and had

¹⁹⁰ IAR, 1939, vol.1, pp.337-43.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² New York Times, 11 Mar 1939.

¹⁹³ Haig to Linlithgow, 25 Mar 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.102.

asked Jawaharlal when he would be willing to take Pant's place as premier. Nehru's answer, said Gandhi, was: "Not yet."¹⁹⁴

Governor Haig raised the issue in a discussion with Nehru's younger sister, Vijayalakshmi Pandit. Mrs. Pandit agreed that the U.P. ministry was embarrassed by the spirit of independence shown by P.C.C. and district committee members. The ministry was finding it difficult to command obedience to their directives. She implied, according to Haig, that the only solution was through the efforts of some strong individual at the top of the provincial Congress (she spoke about Vallabhbhai Patel's power in Bombay province). Haig suggested that Jawaharlal, who was then president of the P.C.C., was the only possible candidate for the U.P. dictator. Mrs. Pandit agreed, said Haig, but explained that her brother seemed for the moment disinclined to take determined action.¹⁹⁵

Nehru described his feelings at the time in terms of his desire to have both a strongly-united and a politically open Congress--two goals which, he implied, could not easily be achieved simultaneously:¹⁹⁶

Gandhiji's fast in connection with Rajkot and the subsequent developments upset me. I wrote then that the "sense of helplessness increases after the Rajkot events. I cannot function where I do not understand, and I do not understand at all the logic of what has taken place." "More and more," I added, "the choice before many of us becomes difficult, and this is not a question of Right or Left or even of political decisions. The choice is of unthinking acceptance of decisions which sometimes contradict one another and have no logical sequence, or opposition, or inaction. Not one of these courses is easily commendable. To accept unthinkingly what one cannot appreciate or willingly agree to produces mental flabbiness and paralysis. No great movement can be carried on on this basis. Opposition is difficult when it weakens us and helps the adversary. Inaction produces frustration and all manner of complexes when from every side comes the call for action."

In Bihar Governor Hallett told the Viceroy that the Congress in his province was also having difficulties controlling its local-level committees. Hallett quoted a letter from Prasad to Nehru written on 19 April which the C.I.D. had intercepted. Prasad said that the political situation arising from the current district board elections had gotten beyond the control of the P.C.C. Whereas the P.C.C. could, in normal times, select Congress candidates for district board elections, the

¹⁹⁴ Linlithgow to Zetland, 4 Apr 1939, *ibid.*, vol.157.

¹⁹⁵ Haig to Linlithgow, 10 Apr 1939, Haig Papers, vol.2a.

¹⁹⁶ Nehru, Towards Freedom (New York, 1942), pp.356-7.

situation had deteriorated to such an extent that local quarrels were now spreading to the P.C.C., according to Prasad.¹⁹⁷ The kisan problem in Bihar was perhaps less troublesome to the Gandhiites than it had been when Swami Sahajanand directed the Bihar kisan sabha. Narendra Deva was president of the All-India Kisan Conference which met in April. Both he and J.P. Narayan called on the participants to work within the Congress as they had in the past.¹⁹⁸ That is, they were being asked to continue to accept the lead of the Gandhiites.

In Bombay province the followers of N.C. Kelkar continued to criticise the Congress ministers, accusing them of using violence to stifle political dissent and of suppressing anti-Gandhiite newspapers with the Press Emergency Powers Act. Gandhi was indeed the Hitler of India, said one editorial writer who also criticised the C.S.P. for betraying their principles in order to gain favor with the Congress leaders.¹⁹⁹ B.G. Kher told Governor Lumley that he and his colleagues were still afraid they would have to resign, despite their recent victory at Tripuri, if Bose tried to exercise his presidential influence over the ministries.²⁰⁰ The first test of Gandhiite strength would come at the A.I.C.C. meeting to be held in Calcutta on the 29th and 30th of April. The Viceroy's advisors felt that it was significant that Gandhi had asked Vallabhbhai Patel to stay away from the meeting so that Rajendra Prasad, a man of "sweet reasonableness," would be able to present the old guard's program to the rest of the Congress.²⁰¹

In the weeks after the Tripuri conference, Bose continued to call for an ultimatum to the British to be followed by renewed civil disobedience. But he hadn't the power to name a Working Committee that would institute such a policy. He attempted to achieve this end through a compromise with the Mahatma. On 25 March he asked Gandhi to let him name half of the Working Committee.²⁰² Then a few days later he offered to let Gandhi name all of the committee members if they would then be bound to deliver some form of his ultimatum to the British.²⁰³ Gandhi told Bose to name his own committee and present it to the vote of the

¹⁹⁷ Hallett to Linlithgow, 30 Apr 1939, Hallett Papers.

¹⁹⁸ Searchlight, 12 Apr 1939.

¹⁹⁹ Maharatta, 31 Mar 1939.

²⁰⁰ Lumley to Linlithgow, 30 Apr 1939, L/P&J/5/158.

²⁰¹ Quarterly Survey . . . 1 Feb-30 Apr 1939, p.25, Linlithgow Papers, vol.142.

²⁰² Bose to Gandhi, 25 Mar 1939, Nehru, Bunch of Old Letters, p.365. Many letters and telegrams from Bose to Gandhi and from Gandhi to Bose were published shortly after the Tripuri conference. A number of them seem to have been written with publication in mind.

²⁰³ Bose to Gandhi, 31 Mar 1939, Bose, Crossroads, p.137.

A.I.C.C.²⁰⁴ Bose continued efforts to reach a compromise but seemed resigned to failure. In mid-April he told his younger brother Arun that he might not be Congress president much longer: "The immediate future is very uncertain. Negotiations are going on between Gandhiji and myself. Whether they will lead to a settlement or not--it is too early to say. It is even possible that ultimately I may have to resign."²⁰⁵

In late-April Arthur Moore, the editor of the Statesman, asked Bose to outline the specific proposals that would be included in the Congress national demand. Bose said he wanted: 1) direct election to the federal legislature from all provinces and from the princely states; 2) direct federal control of external affairs, which could be demitted to the Viceroy for the duration of a war; 3) the Congress would accept Viceregal administration of relations between the princes and the federal government provided that the Viceroy acted in consultation with the federal cabinet; 4) the federal cabinet had to be given control of defense spending, subject to the rules that obtained in the self-governing dominions; and 5) the Congress would allow the scheduled 1942 elections to be held on the basis of the present communal award if a war were in progress at the time. In any other case, or for subsequent elections, there had to be a new communal settlement.²⁰⁶

Moore then asked Bose to comment on the following analysis of the present Congress situation as he, Moore, saw it: 1) Gandhi was opposed to a non-cooperation campaign at that time; 2) non-cooperation would not succeed without Gandhi's leadership and support; 3) because of the near-war situation in Europe, illegal action commenced by Bose would be interpreted as assistance to the fascist dictators; 4) this would be particularly so if a war broke out--non-cooperation during a war would be ruthlessly crushed; 5) Bose could not retain the presidency of the Congress except through an agreement with the Gandhiites. Moore said that Bose only objected to the second proposition; he felt that a non-cooperation campaign could be pursued without Gandhi.²⁰⁷ Bose did, however, seem resigned to leaving the presidency and carrying on his struggle with the Gandhiites through other channels.

Bose addressed the A.I.C.C. on 29 April. He said he had been bound by the Pant resolution to accept Gandhi's advice in the naming of

²⁰⁴Gandhi to Bose, 2 Apr 1939, ibid., p.142.

²⁰⁵Subhas to A.N. Bose, 17 Apr 1939, ibid., p.113.

²⁰⁶Moore to Linlithgow, 27 Apr 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.121.

²⁰⁷Ibid.

a new Working Committee. He had tried to reach some understanding with Gandhi but had failed, he said. Thereupon Bose resigned his office and surrendered the chair to the senior ex-president attending, Sarojini Naidu. Jawaharlal then rose and asked Bose to reconsider. He suggested that Bose reappoint the old Working Committee en bloc and that he be given a guarantee that he could name two new members on the retirement of two of the old guard (Bajaj and Doulatram) which was expected soon. Bose considered the proposal, which had been seconded by J.P. Narayan, but on the next day of the meeting he rejected it. Bose said Gandhi had suggested a similar compromise earlier and he, Bose, did not think it was enough.²⁰⁸

After Bose's final decision, the A.I.C.C. proceeded to elect a new president. K.F. Nariman objected to this procedure and was confronted by Bhulabhai Desai who quoted articles X and XII of the Congress constitution. The latter gave the A.I.C.C. the power to carry out the Congress program and to deal with new problems as they arose. The former stipulated that in the event of the death or resignation of the president, the General Secretary of the Congress should fix a new date for an election. If this were not possible, or in the event of an emergency, the A.I.C.C. could elect a new president. Desai then argued that without a general secretary to fix the date of a new election there could be no election, and in view of the fact that there was no president, Working Committee, or general secretary, an emergency did exist. Bose said that he had appointed an acting-general secretary when J.B. Kripalani resigned. The chairman of the meeting, Mrs. Naidu, then ruled that an acting-general secretary was not a general secretary in terms of the constitution and that the A.I.C.C. should proceed to select a new president. Rajendra Prasad was then elected, whereupon 28 A.I.C.C. members signed a protest resolution circulated by Bose's supporters.²⁰⁹

In a speech given about a week later, Bose described the negotiations that had preceded the A.I.C.C. meeting. He said that until 27 April the Gandhiites had told him to name his own Working Committee and to submit it to a vote of the A.I.C.C. (which Bose had every reason to believe he would lose). Bose said he then repeated his request that Gandhi name the entire committee as per the Pant resolution. Gandhi refused. Bose said he then approached Rajendra Prasad and A.K. Azad and asked to be allowed to name four members of the fourteen-man committee.

²⁰⁸ AICC file G20, part 3, of 1939.

²⁰⁹ IAR, 1939, vol.1, pp.345-49.

They rejected the four specific names he suggested but, according to Bose, gave him the impression that they would let him have four others that they might mutually agree on. Prasad and Azad then suggested four people including, or in addition to (Bose is not clear on this point), Jawaharlal who would be the new general secretary. Bose said that he agreed to this and went to talk to Nehru while the others left to discuss the matter with Gandhi.²¹⁰

When the discussions reconvened, said Bose, the Gandhiites had changed their proposal, evidently on Gandhi's insistence. Gandhi, said Bose, wanted him to name the old Working Committee en bloc and offered to let him name two new members to vacancies that would occur shortly. Bose said he then asked if he could name the new members from the start and was refused. Bose felt that Gandhi's suggestion was, in effect, a demand for a public apology for having defied the Gandhiites by standing for election in the first place. Bose then asked if he could name the 2nd Congress secretary (as one of his two new members) and establish him in Calcutta. When this was refused, said Bose, he decided to resign.²¹¹

Rajendra Prasad responded to Bose's version of the negotiations, saying that Bose misrepresented the position that the Gandhiites had taken. Prasad said that the old guard had assured Bose they would not "non-cooperate . . . nor in any way obstruct or hamper him with the help of the majority we had in the All-India Congress Committee." In other words, they would allow a free vote on Bose's Working Committee. Prasad also said that Bose was assured that he could name more Working Committee members as other vacancies occurred.²¹² It seems significant that Prasad did not challenge any of the specific points that Bose made. Bose's account was probably an accurate one.

Having reestablished de jure control of the central machinery of the Congress, the Gandhiites began the process of strengthening their hold on the rest of the organization. On the day after he was elected, Prasad appointed a new Working Committee, including the Gandhiites who had resigned in February and (in place of Nehru and Sarat Bose) the

²¹⁰ Searchlight, 9 May 1939.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid., 10 May 1939. Rajagopalachari later said that he thought Bose might have retained the presidency and have gained more than two seats on the Working Committee if he had put such a proposal to the A.I.C.C. directly. Rajaji implied that the A.I.C.C. was eager for a show of unity and might have put up with a number of Bose's supporters if he had pressed for a reasonable compromise. Erskine to Linlithgow, 8 May 1939, Erskine Papers, vol. 16.

Bengali leaders B.C. Roy and Profulla Ghosh (the latter had, unlike B.C. Roy, supported Sitaramayya and was probably responsible for a number of the 79 votes Sitaramayya gathered in Bengal).²¹³ The A.I.C.C. then appointed a committee consisting of Nehru, Sitaramayya, Narendra Deva, and Kripalani to "recommend measures for the purification of the Congress in terms of the Congress Resolution."²¹⁴ That is, they were to suggest amendments to the constitution that would tighten the procedures which had allowed Bose to be elected Congress president.

Having lost the presidency of the Congress, Bose was no longer of great value to the various anti-Gandhiite and radical leftist groups that had supported his candidacy. He could no longer directly influence Congress policy at the national level, and he could not deliver on his promise to radicalize the Congress program. His position in Bengal, however, was perhaps slightly strengthened because he was no longer hindered by the Gandhiite policy on the communal award. On 5 May the Governor of Bengal, Sir Robert Reid, told the Viceroy that the appointment of B.C. Roy and Profulla Ghosh to the Working Committee had re-emphasized the Congress split in Bengal. Reid said that Bose was gaining support in the Hindu communal press and losing support in the leftist press.²¹⁵

Bose was able to maintain control of the Bengal Congress after his resignation. On 22 May Governor Reid told the Viceroy that the finance minister of Bengal, N.R. Sarkar, had resumed his negotiations with B.C. Roy, Gandhi, and G.D. Birla, presumably in aid of a coalition between conservative Muslims and Congressmen. Their main problem, said Reid, was the fact that Bose had the provincial Congress organization in his pocket.²¹⁶ K.S. Roy, a member of the B.C. Roy faction, said a few days later that Bose had, in defiance of an agreement with his colleagues, filled the executive committee of the Bengal P.C.C. with his own supporters.²¹⁷ Bose, although he controlled the Bengal Congress, would have a difficult time forming a Congress coalition with leftist

²¹³ Ghosh promised his full support to the Gandhiites on the day it became clear that Bose would stand for office. Ghosh to J.B. Kripalani, 21 Jan 1939, AICC file G79 of 1939.

²¹⁴ IAR, 1939, vol.1, p.351.

²¹⁵ Reid to Linlithgow, 5 May 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.39.

²¹⁶ Reid to Linlithgow, 22 May 1939, L/P&J/5/144.

²¹⁷ Searchlight, 8 Jun 1939.

Muslims because he could expect no help from the Working Committee.²¹⁸

Bose was in the unenviable position of having to please a faction in the Bengal Congress that wanted control of the Bengal ministry, while trying to retain the support of various dissidents at the national level who wanted a general political shake-up. The aims of the two groups diverged at many points. Bose tried to rally his supporters by creating for them a political party with a broad ideological foundation, broad enough to embrace the greatest possible number of dissidents within a single leftist party.

A few days after his resignation, Bose announced the formation of a new party within the Congress to be called the Forward Bloc. This party, said Bose, would provide a forum for all leftist elements in the Congress. The new party was not auspiciously successful. The British Communist Party and the Communist Party of India both advised their followers not to join the Bloc, because to do so would tend to jeopardize the Communist united front policy. The C.S.P. soon followed suit and, like the Communists, went no further than to allow a few of its representatives to sit on the Left Consolidation Committee which Bose formed after his Forward Bloc failed to get off to a good start.²¹⁹

M.N. Roy's group was not quite as quick to disown the Bloc. In early and mid-June Roy said that as long as the Forward Bloc had no "distinct ideological foundation" it could not succeed. If it acquired collective leadership and a proper ideology, said Roy, his group, the League of Radical Congressmen, would support it.²²⁰ The acting Governor of Bengal took this to mean that Roy would join the party only if he could help direct it and said that neither Bose nor Roy appeared to trust the other.²²¹ By the end of June Roy had abandoned the Forward Bloc.²²²

²¹⁸ Bose continued to try to form a Bengal Congress-coalition ministry until he left India during the war. After the Congress ministries resigned in the early days of the war, Bose went so far as to ask the Government of India to help him form a ministry. On 29 December 1940 he told the Viceroy that the Huq ministry was in power only because of British support. If that support were removed, said Bose, he could, with the confidence of a large segment of the Muslim community, form a ministry that would bring justice, purity, and efficiency to Bengal government. Bose said that if the Viceroy could not agree to help him, he should at least encourage his governor to institute emergency rule and end the corrupt Huq government. Bose to Linlithgow, 29 Dec 1940, L/P&J/8/639.

²¹⁹ Quarterly Survey . . . 31 Jul 1939, p.17, Linlithgow Papers, vol.142.

²²⁰ Independent India, 11 & 18 Jun 1939.

²²¹ J. Woodhead to Linlithgow, 19 Jun 1939, L/P&J/5/144.

²²² Searchlight, 30 Jun 1939.

Bose had better luck recruiting politicians who were not quite so extreme in their defense of socialism but who were willing to join a promising anti-Gandhiite alliance. Vallabhbhai Patel's chief political rival in Bombay, K.F. Nariman, was one of the first vice-presidents of Bose's party. Nariman took control of the Bombay branch of the Forward Bloc in early May when the party was founded.²²³ In June the militant Hindu leader, Swami Govinadanand, a long-time opponent of the old guard in Sind, announced his support of the Bloc at a party meeting in Karachi.²²⁴ Even M.S. Aney, who had supported the Pant resolution at Tripuri, assisted the Bose faction by attacking the Working Committee. D.P. Mishra, who described himself as a recent convert to the Gandhiite philosophy, criticised Aney for assuming a pose of neutrality while his friends in the Marathi press villified the Mahatma.²²⁵

Sardul Singh Caveeshar, himself a vice-president of the Forward Bloc, explained some of the attractions of Bose's anti-Gandhiite party at a speech given to potential converts. According to Caveeshar, Bose's victory in the January election was not due to his socialist support but to his personality and to the "absurd" errors made by the old guard in opposing him. Even so, argued Caveeshar, the new coalition represented by the Bloc offered an even greater chance for "party formation" than had the anti-ministry effort that Caveeshar led in 1936-37.²²⁶ In other words, Caveeshar hoped the Bloc would be able to contain enough anti-Gandhiites to challenge the old guard's control of the Congress.

Bose attempted to get Dr. Ambedkar to ally his untouchables with the Bloc, but Ambedkar, allegedly, refused unless Bose agreed to sever his connections with the Congress.²²⁷ Subhas also carried on discussions with M.A. Jinnah in an attempt to gather Muslim support for the Bloc. Vallabhbhai Patel attributed Bose's subsequent denunciation of the Bombay ministry's prohibition campaign to these talks with Jinnah.²²⁸ An attack on the Gandhiite efforts to enforce prohibition in Bombay would have appealed to many Muslims who had previously accused the ministry of

²²³ Patel to Nehru, 12 May 1939, J. Nehru Papers, part I, vol. 81.

²²⁴ Hindustan Standard, 13 Jun 1939, cutting in the B.C. Roy Papers, part V, file 11.

²²⁵ Mishra to Aney, 7 & 21 Jun 1939, Aney Papers.

²²⁶ Undated notes for a speech [probably given in Jul 1939], Notebook on Speeches, Caveeshar Papers.

²²⁷ Prasad to Patel, 16 Jul 1939, Prasad Papers, file 1C of 1939.

²²⁸ Patel to Prasad, 17 Jul 1939, ibid.

trying to make up lost alcohol revenue with compensatory taxes that discriminated against the Muslim community.²²⁹

The established leaders of the Congress were quick to oppose the new party that Bose formed. On 24 May Jawaharlal spoke for his fellows when he denounced the negativism of the Forward Bloc: "It is, so far as is known at present a negative grouping, an anti-bloc, whose sole binding cement is dislike of, or opposition to, the individuals or groups that control the Congress today." The members of the Bloc had no guiding policy or principle, said Nehru; they were only interested in stirring things up. The Congress had trouble controlling "adventurist and opportunist elements," he said. But Nehru hinted that the old guard was prepared to take firm steps to curb their activities: "Long tradition and the inherent strength of the organization keep them in check to some extent, and we are now thinking of devising rules to control them still further."²³⁰

On 26 and 27 June the A.I.C.C. met in Bombay and passed a resolution designed to control radical kisan agitators who had been reluctant to follow P.C.C. orders. It was decided that, in future, no Congressman could participate in a satyagraha campaign without the prior consent of his P.C.C. The British described the resolution as an ultimatum to the Congress radicals to either comply with Gandhite policy or be expelled from the Congress. They said that the C.S.P., represented by J.P. Narayan and Narendra Deva, had opposed the resolution and that the Working Committee had been willing to postpone it, but the Congress ministers had forced it to a decision. It passed by a vote of 130 to 60. The Viceroy's advisors also noted that the A.I.C.C. endorsed a Working Committee warning against P.C.C. interference in the work of the Congress ministries. It was reiterated that P.C.C.s which had complaints against their ministries were required to refer such complaints to the Parliamentary Sub-committee and to avoid public discussion of their differences with the ministries.²³¹

Rammanohar Lohia complained to Gandhi that the stifling of small-scale satyagraha would prevent peasant discouragement from being channeled into controlled lines and might result in anarchy. Gandhi did not agree;

²²⁹ H.A. Laljee to Vallabhbhai Patel, 2 Apr 1939, Kher Papers, part I, file 6.

²³⁰ Nehru, Unity of India, p.163.

²³¹ Quarterly Survey . . . 31 Jul 1939, pp.15-27 & 37, Linlithgow Papers, vol.142.

he felt that the unrest of the peasants was a result of outside agitation:²³²

I regret to have to say that in most cases the peasants are not educated for non-violent action. They are being kept in a state of perpetual excitement and are made to entertain hopes which can never be fulfilled without a violent conflict. The same may safely be said about labour.

Subhas Bose was undoubtedly one of the agitators that Gandhi referred to. On 9 July he had organized a series of demonstrations against the A.I.C.C. resolution. After an exchange of letters with Rajendra Prasad, Bose remained defiant, and on 9 August the Working Committee met to consider what action could be taken. The committee passed a resolution disqualifying Bose from Congress office for three years and removing him from the presidency of the Bengal P.C.C. The Working Committee also noted that other Congressmen had, while under Bose's influence, defied Congress discipline. These were let off with a warning.²³³ Gandhi said later that he had personally drafted the resolution.²³⁴

Although the Working Committee declined to directly punish dissidents other than Bose, some P.C.C.s were subsequently purged of anti-Gandhiite elements. In his public response to Bose's call for defiance of the A.I.C.C. resolution, Rajendra Prasad warned Congress office holders that they faced disciplinary action if they took part in the demonstrations set for 9 July.²³⁵ One defendant in disciplinary action taken by the Mahakoshal P.C.C. claimed that, although he was an office holder in the Congress, he had not given up his right as a Congressman to protest action taken by the A.I.C.C.²³⁶ The response of his prosecutors was that an official of the Congress who wished to publicly protest the actions of his superiors had first to resign his office.²³⁷

In the U.P. there was considerable antagonism between leftists and rightists and between factions of each of these larger groups. The entire Lahore Congress Committee had taken part in the 9 July demonstrations and there was talk of retribution being taken. Z.A. Ahmad blamed the national leaders of the C.S.P. and the C.P.I. for not controlling their subordinates in the province.²³⁸ Acrimony flared up again when

²³²Harijan, 29 Jul 1939.

²³³IAR, 1939, vol.2, pp.212-13.

²³⁴Harijan, 26 Aug 1939.

²³⁵Press statement of 6 Jul 1939, Prasad Papers, file 1S of 1939.

²³⁶T.L. Singh Chowhan to the President of the Mahakoshal P.C.C., 17 Jul 1939, MPCC Papers, file Aa26, part II.

²³⁷Ibid., see also misc. file 22.

²³⁸Ahmad to Nehru, 18 Jul 1939, J. Nehru Papers, part I, vol.96.

Bose was expelled from Congress office on 9 August. Jawaharlal said he felt the Working Committee punishment was too severe. But he also said it was not worth destroying the Congress to defend Bose. Subhas had become a tool of dissidents, said Nehru. He advised his subordinates in the U.P. to try to make peace between the Congress factions, to try to avoid a civil war that would detract from the anti-imperialist struggle.²³⁹

The situation in Bengal led to a more-direct confrontation between the Working Committee and the Bengal Congress executive. Since they did not control the Bengal P.C.C., the Gandhiites could not get at their opponents in Bengal through the provincial organization. In mid-July B.C. Roy asked the Gandhiites to remove the Bose group from control of the P.C.C. Roy said that the Congress elections, then in progress, were going against Bose's faction but that the results would be nullified if they remained in power long enough to appoint the inevitable election arbitration tribunal.²⁴⁰ Prasad did threaten the P.C.C. with disciplinary action for its part in the demonstrations of 9 July,²⁴¹ and he subsequently suspended the operation of the Bengal election tribunal.²⁴² But the Gandhiites did not expel Bose's group from the P.C.C. nor take the sort of action that would guarantee Roy's success. The internal pressures in the Congress were eased somewhat by the outbreak of the Second World War.

When the war began in Europe, the Working Committee decided, against Gandhi's advice, to demand substantial concessions from the Government of India in return for Congress cooperation in the conduct of the war.²⁴³ This decision led inevitably to the resignations of the Congress ministries. During the summer a great deal of pending legislation had been enacted and it is perhaps reasonable to suppose that further basic reforms would be long in coming. If the Congress ministries had remained in office, they would have been required to participate in the repressive measures the British would demand for the conduct of the

²³⁹ Nehru to Sri Prakash, 15 Aug 1939, ibid.

²⁴⁰ B.C. Roy to Patel, 16 Jul 1939, B.C. Roy Papers, part II, file 41.

²⁴¹ Prasad to Executive Committee Bengal P.C.C., 18 Jul 1939, Prasad Papers, file 2C of 1939.

²⁴² Hindustan Standard, 12 Aug 1939, press cutting in B.C. Roy Papers, part V, file 14.

²⁴³ C.I.D. report on the Working Committee meeting of 8-12 Sep 1939, L/P&J/8/587.

war.²⁴⁴ As it was the Congress could, by withdrawing its ministries before a strict, wartime rule was instituted, freely criticise the British repression while emphasizing the reforms accomplished by the ministries during their two years in office.²⁴⁵ The Gandhites would lose a great deal with the resignations of the ministries, but they would gain an opportunity to rally diverse Congress elements to resist British oppression.

In early October Nehru asked Lord Linlithgow to support the implementation of the U.P. tenancy reform bill which had just been passed by the U.P. assembly and awaited the governor's signature. Nehru implied that peasant reaction to or dissatisfaction with the compromise bill would be controlled by the Congress. He assured the Viceroy that though the U.P. Congress contained about 70,000 members of various small committees each with a certain amount of independence, P.C.C. decisions would be carried out.²⁴⁶ Gandhi also mentioned what he felt was a change in the attitude of the U.P.P.C.C. and implied that the same change could be seen in all parts of the Congress.

Jawaharlal had asked Gandhi to talk to the U.P. Provincial Congress Committee. Gandhi said he expected a parting of the ways. Some of the members, he said, had opposed him, had "laughed at the Charkha and non-violence." But now they were reconciled to both, according to the Mahatma. Gandhi said he wondered if he should lead these men into a renewed struggle; they and their fellows in other provinces had refused to follow him in peace time. Would they now follow him during the war?: "If I was not good enough in peace, how can I be good in war? . . . And yet I could not distrust the responsible men who faced me in Allahabad. What is true of them is true of the other Congress-

²⁴⁴ See Patel to Kher, 15 Oct 1939, Kher Papers, part I, file 6.

²⁴⁵ In February 1940 the Congress published an analysis of the achievements of the Congress ministries, giving a long list of various reforms instituted. Each of the major Congress legislative acts was listed with the "cash value" of the benefit accruing to the Indian people as a result of the reform. Thus, for example: Prohibition in Madras was said to have saved the Indian peasants Rs. 26 million per year. Land revenue remissions in the U.P. were said to be worth Rs. 35.7 million to U.P. landlords and Rs. 107.1 million to U.P. tenants. And a reduction in irrigation rates in the Central Provinces was said to have saved the users Rs. 200,000. AICC, Report of the General Secretary, March 1939 to February 1940 (Allahabad, 1940), pp.80-84.

²⁴⁶ Nehru to Linlithgow, 6 Oct 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol.121.

men in the other Provinces. And so I am shouldering the burden."²⁴⁷

Some measure of the Gandhiites' success can be seen in the results of the 1940 Congress presidential election. A.K. Azad, the Gandhiite candidate, defeated his opponent, M.N. Roy, by a vote of 1864 to 183.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷Harijan, 1 Dec 1939.

²⁴⁸Hindustan Standard, 16 Feb 1940, press cutting in B.C. Roy Papers, part V, file 14.

CONCLUSION

During the 1920s and 30s the Gandhiite leaders of the Congress managed to weave a number of the trappings of Gandhian philosophy into the fabric of the Congress constitution. To be a Congressman was to wear Khaddar, to attest to the value of spinning, to advocate non-violence, to profess a belief in the tenets of Gandhian philosophy. And to do these things was to declare how much a part of the Congress Gandhi had become. The Gandhiites demonstrated an ability to raise money and mobilize thousands of supporters, either for an election campaign or for an anti-government demonstration. Those who attacked any part of the Gandhian program attacked Gandhi and risked the loss of the organizational power he brought to the Congress.

The Gandhiites had a talent for presenting Gandhi and the Gandhian program as a "take it or leave it" package. They made it difficult to accept the one and to reject the other. Time and time again, Gandhi told his followers that they had to accept all of his advice if they wanted his leadership. As are a number of pacifists, Gandhi was fond of military analogies. He often likened himself to a general, but a general who, as the leader of a non-violent army, had no power to punish, no right to compel obedience. He could only use persuasion. He said he would not be hurt if Congressmen (the assembled Congress session) relieved him of his command--indeed, he would be grateful for their frankness. But, he said, if they wanted to keep their general, they had to follow his orders, they had to accept military discipline.

Young, Europe- or America-returned radicals who wished to change Congress economic and political policy distinguished between the concepts of loyalty to Gandhi and of loyalty to Gandhi's economic and political views. Gandhi was a symbol of much that was progressive to their minds, but they considered his program to be a sham kind of socialism. Peasants could not afford to wear khaddar, could not buy it in place of less-expensive mill cloth, could not spare the time to spin and weave their own khaddar. Indian industrialists who made millions exploiting their workers and selling cheap mill cloth to peasants could afford to dabble in politics. But, in the opinion of the socialists, putting khaddar on a Birla or Bajaj did not make him a friend of the Indian masses.

Congress socialists made a number of attempts to push the independence struggle beyond the limits set by Gandhi and, thus, to shake the Gandhiite hold on the Congress. They resisted pressure to end civil disobedience. They tried to build a restricted movement against office acceptance into an all-out war with the Raj. They sought to make common cause with the oppressed peoples of the princely states. Each time, the Gandhiites contained their efforts--accepted some of their demands, rejected others, or stalled until the heat of the issue died away. Congress radicals found some allies but made few lasting converts to socialism. At the end of the 1930s, radical political parties in and on the periphery of the Congress (the C.S.P., the C.P.I., and the League of Radical Congressmen) numbered their followers only in the thousands, but the Congress (and thus the Gandhiites) numbered theirs in the millions.

In 1939 the banner of radicalism, of leftism, shifted from Congress socialists to more traditional Indian politicians who'd been displaced by the Gandhiites. Socialism became a symbol of an anti-Gandhiite coalition, a basis for the temporary unity of the Boses, the Narimans, and the Khares of the Congress. The Gandhiites had made enemies, had wounded a number of locally-powerful politicians, in their efforts to construct a broadly-based and highly-disciplined political organization. One such locally-powerful politician was Swami Govindanand of Sind.

Govindanand and the Gandhiite Jairamdas Doulatram were, in the 1920s, rivals for the leadership of the Sind Congress. By the early 1930s Govindanand found himself in dire political straits. A militant Hindu in a Muslim-majority province, a Congressman opposed by the leaders of the Congress and frustrated by their policy towards the communal award, he had few prospects for maintaining his political power. In November 1933 he appealed to Congress conservatives who wanted to end civil disobedience; he said he agreed with their aim and would help them.¹ He also asked for help from prominent Congress leftists, to whom he complained of Gandhi's stifling power.² In early 1935, as Jairamdas tried to interest the Sind Congress in Gandhi's newly-formed All-India Village Industries Association, Govindanand supported efforts

¹Govindanand to S. Satyamurti, 17 Nov 1933, Home Pol., file 4/19 of 1933.

²Govindanand to J. Nehru, 24 Nov 1933, J. Nehru Papers, part I, vol.19.

to establish a branch of the C.S.P. in the province.³ A few months later he tried to form a Sind branch of the Congress Nationalist Party which M.M. Maliviya and M.S. Aney had established in order to oppose Congress policy towards the communal award.⁴

In September 1936 Govindanand asked for and was denied a place on the Congress Party ticket for the 1937 elections. The P.S.C. decided that, "in the light of his recent activities," he could not represent the Congress.⁵ Govindanand was subsequently forced to resign the presidency of the Sind P.C.C. He claimed that Vallabhbhai Patel had been responsible for the Congress shunning him. Patel, he said, had condemned him unheard on the testimony of Doulatram and others of his enemies.⁶ Govindanand's later decisions to oppose the Gandhiite candidate in the 1939 Congress presidential election and then to work for the Forward Bloc are hardly remarkable. And his was not an unique or even an extraordinary case. Govindanand's career shows a number of parallels with those of others of Bose's supporters. It is not wholly dissimilar to that of Bose himself.

Subhas Chandra Bose represented a middle-class, largely-urban, Hindu constituency which was, under the provisions of the communal award, likely to lose its predominant place in Bengal politics to the newly-enfranchised Muslim majority in the electorate. Bose opposed the Gandhiite leaders of the Congress who, he claimed, supported his political enemies and neglected the best interests of Bengal and of the country in general. Gandhi, he said, had been a dynamic force in the Congress in the early 1920s but had failed, since that time, to provide the Congress with the progressive leadership it required. By opposing various Gandhiite policies before 1939, by standing for the presidency of the Congress against the Gandhiite candidate, and by forming the Forward Bloc, Bose put himself forward as the dynamic leader the organization needed and did not have in Gandhi.

Vallabhbhai Patel and others of the Gandhiites found Bose's political philosophy and personality distasteful. Gandhi himself chastised Bose for advocating measures that Gandhi thought would lead to violence as he had earlier criticised Bose's penchant for parades and

³FR, Bombay, 2nd half of Jan and 1st half of Feb 1935.

⁴Secretary of the Sind P.C.C. to Maliviya, 1 Oct 1936, Aney Papers, part II, file 9.

⁵Searchlight, 30 Sep 1936.

⁶Govindanand to Prasad, 5 Oct 1936, and attached clipping from the Karachi Daily, 4 Oct 1936, Prasad Papers, file I of 1936.

para-military organizations. The Gandhiites tried to compromise with Bose. They offered him high office but not great power. When this proved not to satisfy him, they waited out the storm of his success, maneuvered him into a position of weakness, and crushed him.

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